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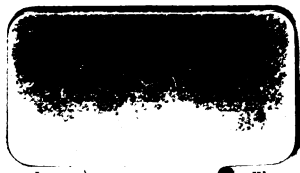
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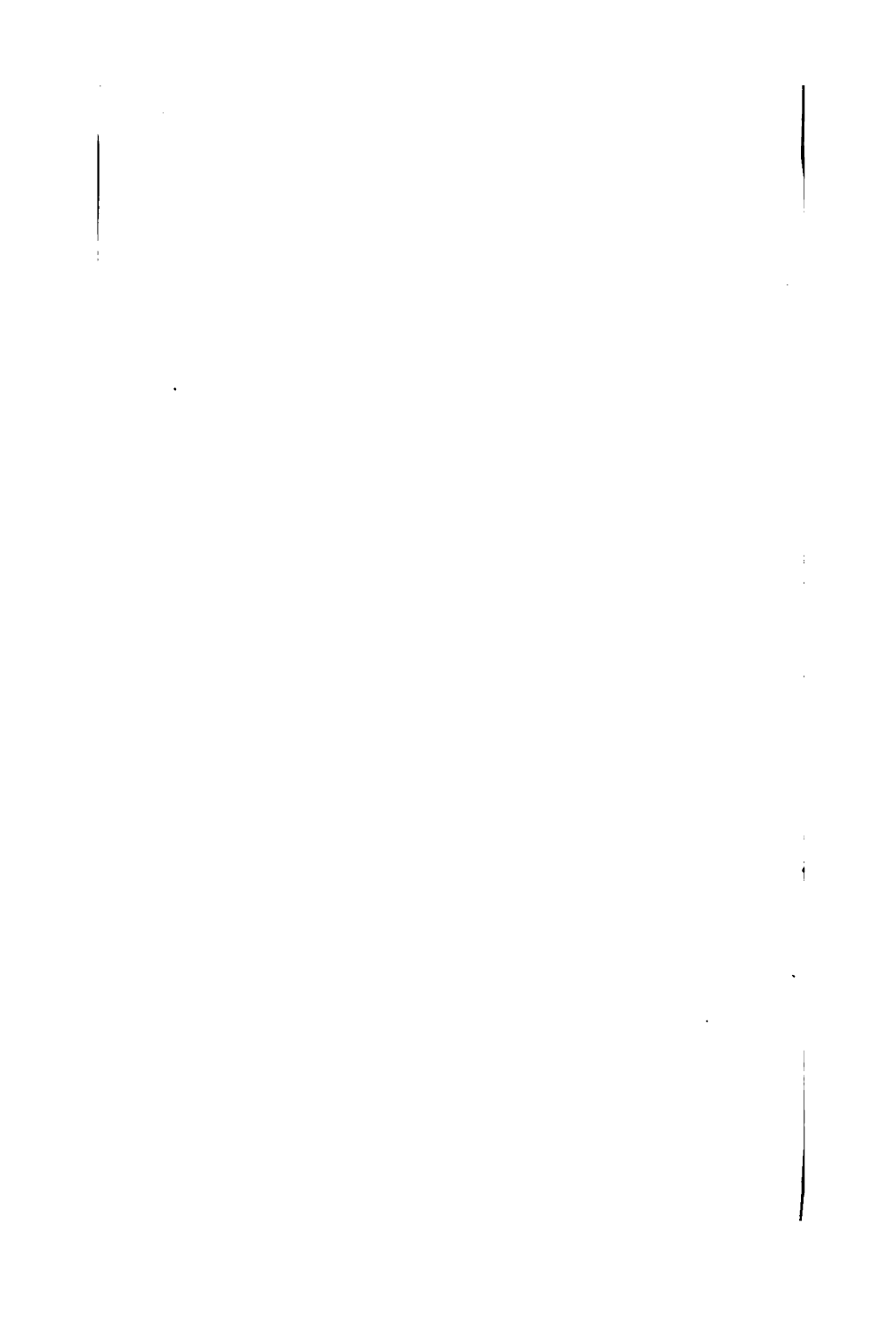
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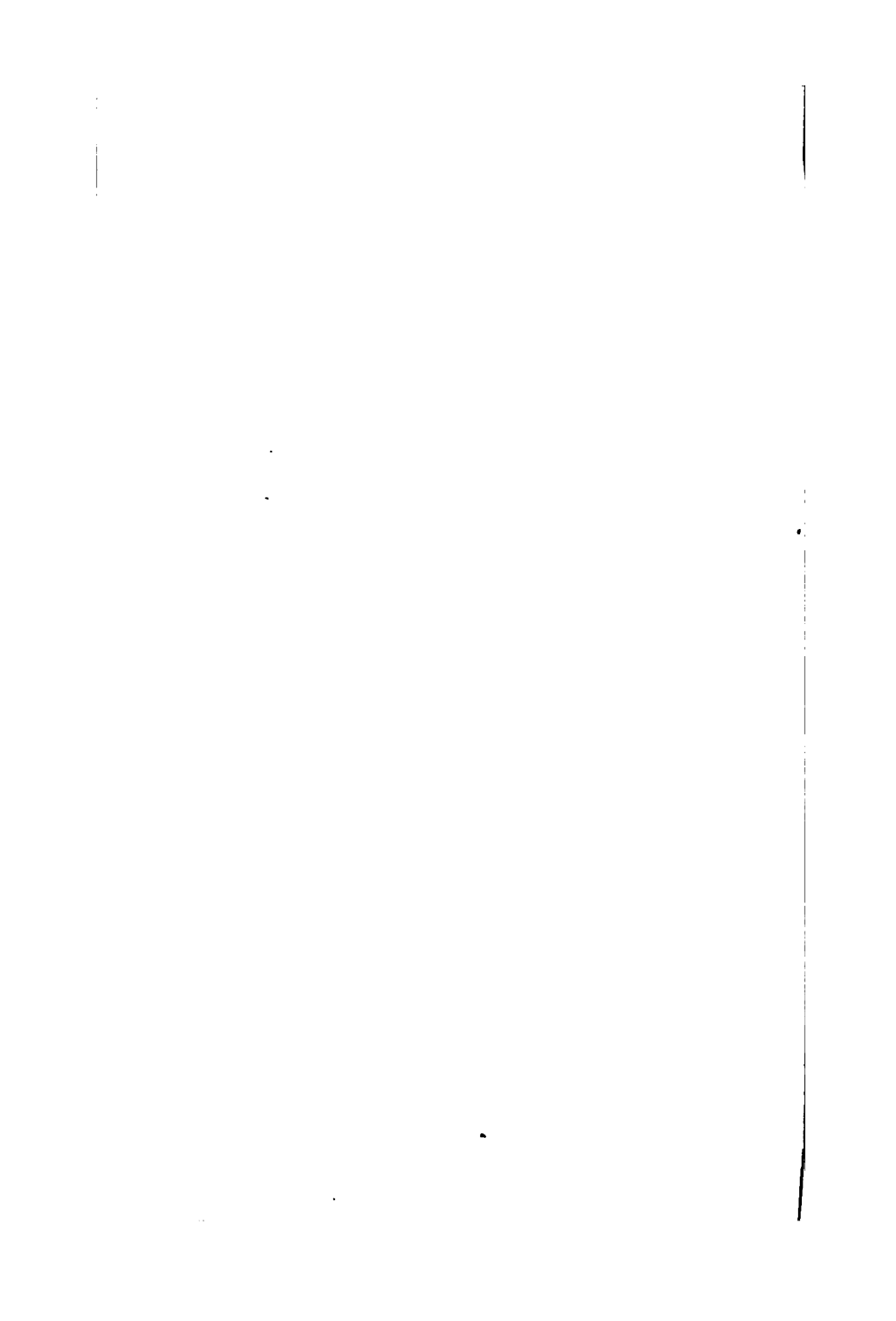






**‘LONG, LONG AGO.’**





# 'LONG, LONG AGO:'

AN AUTOBIOGRAPHY.



BY

MARY LISLE.

LONDON:

J. AND C. MOZLEY, 6, PATERNOSTER ROW;

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1856.

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‘ Child of my brain, fond Imp, who many a day  
Hast, as I nurs’d thee, soothed my grief away ;  
Bred in those shades whose solitary reign  
Gave heart-sick Sorrow leisure to complain,  
Go forth, and with attemper’d fears await,  
From the world’s curious eye, thy doubtful fate.’

*Sir Egerton Brydges.*



# 'LONG, LONG AGO.'

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## CHAPTER I.

### THE FIRST VISIT.

'I'll tell you the tales which to me were so dear,  
Long, long ago, long ago.'

I HOPE that in writing the following pages, I shall not be betrayed into speaking too much of myself, and making my own feelings and thoughts of too much importance; still less into representing myself to the reader as anything of a heroine, and that I may avoid this temptation, I shall rather narrate such circumstances as personally I had but little to do with; for I do not take up my pen to indulge an egotistical vanity, but that in recalling the memory of the days 'Long, long ago,' I may for a season lose the sense of my own loneliness, and in fancy gather around me the guides and companions of my youth. Amongst the multitude of books that are written now-a-days, I have

no hope of mine ever being heard of beyond the small circle of friends, who will have a value for it wholly independent of its literary merits.

A true picture of a country home, such as it might have been nearly sixty years ago, and a brief record of some too early snatched away from this world, is all I aspire to give. Indeed, such progress has education made since I was a child, and so learned are the present race, that I am deeply conscious of my own inability to teach anything to so forward a generation. But I think if I write only of such things as I have seen and known, I shall not be liable to expose the ignorance I am so sensible of to the ridicule of my juniors; and there are, perhaps, some amongst them who may take an interest in comparing the world as I knew it, with the world as they know it now. The rectory house of Mitchelmore, was the home of the greater part of my childhood. It lay about a mile distant from the great western road, and was built in a pretty woody meadow. I recollect well the day we first arrived there, indeed, it is almost my earliest recollection.

The living of Mitchelmore is in the gift of our family, and my father succeeded to it on the death of an uncle. Before that, we had been living in Devonshire. Ah! I often in after days heard my mother sigh for the hills and streams of her native land, (for she was a Devonshire woman,)

with its soft mild atmosphere. I was about five years old when we removed to Mitchelmore, my brother Edward was six, and Eleanor and Agnes were eight and nine. My father's name was Lisle, and he had one brother in India, who lived to be a general officer.

It was quite late in the evening when we arrived at our new home. And weary as everybody was, no one could rest or do anything until we children had been attended to. Edward and I were immediately led off to the nursery, and Eleanor and Agnes followed. I remember now my astonishment when instead of the little cheerful nursery I had been used to, I found myself in a long narrow room, with a dull fire burning at one end, and heavy dark-green moreen curtains hanging over the windows, and a bit of old carpet of the same dingy colour covering the middle of the floor.

The first thing I did on being set down on the rug, was to march off to a door by the side of the chimney corner, and pull it open. It proved the entrance to a dark cupboard of some depth, at the very bottom of which lay some black-looking object, which to my youthful imagination wore a terrific form. In an agony of fear I shook my frock at the enemy, and ran screaming back to tell the nurse. She immediately went into the cupboard herself, and brought out a large black kettle, exclaiming that it was 'just the very thing



that they were looking for and could not find.' It was speedily filled with water and set on the fire, and in watching the steam which presently issued from its spout, I forgot my terror for a season. But my after acquaintance with that cupboard was not likely to make me regard it with a friendly eye; for within it I passed many a solitary half-hour, being invariably shut up there whenever I was naughty. I wish I could say that they were half-hours of penitence, but the truth is, the first part of them was usually spent in a violent struggle to force open the door, and the latter in resting from my exertions.

I wish I could convey to my reader a just idea of my father and mother. In the sight of their Maker they had doubtless faults—but, thanks be to God, in the sight of their children they had none. With such excellent parents we should have been guilty indeed, had we failed in filial reverence and respectful duty. That we could ever be as good and wise as they, seemed scarcely possible, and if I may say so without boasting, I think we truly honoured them. I know we should never have dared to speak of them in the way in which I hear young people in these days speaking of their parents. My father was a tall spare man, with keen grey eyes and dark eyebrows, a high nose, thin lips, and square chin, with a remarkably rich mellow complexion. My memory tells me that in his youth he must have been very

handsome. I never thought so as a child, but as I grew older I became aware that there was a nobility in his head and features rarely to be met with. I used to think that there could not be a finer sight than to see him of an evening sitting at the table and reading a chapter of the Bible to his family. The light of the candle irradiating the lofty polished head, and bringing out his features in strong contrast to the surrounding gloom, while the deep melodious reverence of his voice brought home to each heart that it was, indeed, the word of God that he was reading. I have often thought since, what a beautiful humility there was in his manner, as if he too were reading for instruction, and felt that before his Maker all were alike ignorant. Kind, but grave, he repelled all familiarity by a reserved and dignified manner, which he never laid aside. It procured from him an unusual degree of deference from both high and low; as the poor people said, 'he was so fine a gentleman,' that none could withstand the influence of his unruffled good breeding. I have seen him treat a poor woman in a cottage with as much courteous consideration as if she had been a duchess, and lift his hat from his head to return the salutation of some feeble old labourer, as respectfully as he would have done to any richer neighbour. He was a magistrate as well as a clergyman, for in those days the two offices were often united, and he therefore settled the whole

affairs of the parish of Mitchelmore, secular as well as ecclesiastical. As a judge he would have been inflexibly just, but my dear mother gave him that leaning towards mercy which should always be the characteristic of administrators of the law. His was a firm, prompt, vigorous government, which kept the parish in excellent order. I doubt whether it has ever been as sober and quiet since.

When first I remember my father he wore powder, and to my mind he never looked so grand a gentleman after he had left it off. I suppose it is owing to the circumstance of my recollecting him in it, which has given me a prejudice in favour of the unnatural custom. I confess I never see the footmen sunning themselves at the doors of the houses in Belgravia, without thinking how handsome and gentlemanlike they look. But even in those days it was going out of fashion, and my father was one of the last who wore it. I must have seen my mother in it also, but I do not recollect it. My dear, dear, mother! The sweetest, gentlest, kindest woman that ever lived. She had even to very old age, a smooth fair roundish face, which long preserved to her the look of youth, a fresh clear complexion, and large open soft grey eyes, whose mild benevolence of expression might have well become an angel. Love and peace were the precious fruits of her presence, and she drew all hearts towards her by the tenderness and warmth of her own. I do not believe that

from the day of her marriage with my father, to the day of her death, she ever once contradicted him, or differed from him in judgment. But then she had a faultless temper either by nature or cultivation, and she had no theories, ecclesiastical or secular, those pet children of the mind, to make her irritable. She had faith, no mortal more, but she had no opinions. She knew nothing of controversy, and never talked of what she did not understand. It was not the fashion in those days for ladies to do so. She believed that to be right which my father said was right, and looked up to him with almost childlike reverence, as to her spiritual and mental guide. Now that I can understand their lives, I know how exquisitely happy they were together, and how blessed we their children were in having such parents.

She taught us not directly by precept, but indirectly by example, to honour and obey our father, to think his slightest notice a high reward, and feel that when he laid his hand upon our heads and blessed us, the blessing of God followed his touch, and flowed in his words. Even now, though many a long year has passed since the grave closed over his honoured form, his children still think of him with reverence, and practise and cherish his precepts. I believe my mother had not been a beauty in her youth, but we thought her lovely, and I am much mistaken if her husband did not also. However, she always said herself that

she was only tolerably well-looking. Her sister Mary was the beauty, and beautiful indeed she was. She was many years younger than my mother, and about a year before we removed to Mitchelmore she had married a Mr. Leicester, a great friend of my father's. He was a handsome, portly man, and rich, but he was odd, and so shy, that he could not bear to go into company. Indeed he never looked anyone in the face when he spoke, and would rather go up-stairs in the dark than ask the servant for a candle. I remember his seizing my hand one day, and running with me to hide himself behind a shrubbery, out of the way of some morning visitors. He pretended to do so in joke, but his desire not to be seen was very genuine. I used to wonder, and I wonder still, how he ever plucked up courage to ask my aunt to marry him.

We had been at Mitchelmore nearly a twelve-month before my uncle and aunt paid us their first visit. Alas! alas! Little as we then foresaw it, it was their first and last. Ah! could we see how rapidly our laughter is to be turned into weeping, every smile would vanish, ere it parted the lips, and tears would flow when our hearts should be merry! It was August when the Leicesters came to us, for my mother wished them to see our new home, when it had all its summer bravery on of leaves and flowers. At best, she said it could bear no comparison with

her beautiful native Devonshire. But to my mind, Mitchelmore had a beauty of its own. There was a pleasant bowery wood-walk and cop-pice beyond, fine timber growing in the wide hedgerows, a little stream running through the meadows, keeping them verdant all the year, and above all, there was that look of richness and fruitfulness which is the peculiar charm of a highly cultivated country. The ponderous ricks gathered round the farm at the back of the house, if they did not add to the actual beauty, were suggestive of plenty and comfort, and, moreover, afforded us a shelter from many a cold, northerly wind. I cannot but think that a rich pastoral country, which may be called in scripture phrase a land 'flowing with milk and honey,' lifts the mind to the beneficent Creator, as directly as any barren heaths and mountains, however beautiful, can do. I love to stand on some high hill, and look over fields, all golden with waving corn, and green meadows, where the sheep and cattle are feeding, and see the blessing of God on the toil of mankind, and feel the fulfilment of the primitive injunction, to go forth and replenish and subdue the earth.

It was very late in the day when my uncle and aunt reached us, bringing with them their little child, about half a year old, and her nurse. The arrival of the baby was a great event to us. Eleanor and Agnes were allowed to carry it up

and down the nursery, and even Edward and I had it placed in our arms for a moment.

By-and-by my aunt came in, partly to see us children, and partly to see that her dear little girl was properly cared for. My sisters had seen her before, but I never had since I had acquired the power of observing, and I thought then, and I think now, that a more lovely creature never walked this earth. Her eyes had much the same sweet look in them as my mother's, but the colour was more brilliant, and somehow the glance was more lively. Perhaps also her complexion was less fair, but it was not less transparent, and her cheek glowed with a richer and a deeper rose. I have seen many and many a reputed beauty since those days, but none who could bear a comparison with her. Every feature was faultless, every gesture was graceful. Her head was so beautifully set on her shoulders, her throat was so upright, small, and round, her whole form was so radiant of youth, health, and life, that my father used to say that he knew not whether she would have formed a better model for a Euphrosyne or for a Hebe.

We were at supper when she came in, and as that meal consisted, as it so happened, of bread and treacle, we must have had dirty sticky little mouths; we were, however, all duly kissed and admired. Eleanor was pronounced to have grown like my father, and very proud of the likeness

she was, and Agnes like my mother, while Edward and I were declared to be like nothing on earth but each other. Indeed, Aunt Mary said, that if we were dressed in the same clothes, she should never be able to discover which was Edward and which was May. Mary was my real name, Aunt Mary being my godmother, but everyone called me little May, because I was born on May day. I remember my aunt's saying with a merry laugh, that she should think it her duty to whip me every day during her visit, lest I should not get my proper share of that wholesome correction. She, however, did nothing worse than give me a handsome Bible and Prayer-book, in which she wrote my name with her own beautiful hand. Mr. Leicester was my godfather, although he was not married to my aunt when I was born ; indeed, it was at my baptism that they first met. I have heard my mother say, that when I was an infant he used to take a great deal of notice of me, by way of pleasing Aunt Mary, and I believe that to the end he had a kindness for me greater than that he bore for any of the others, for her dear sake. Even we could see how much he loved her, how his eyes followed her wherever she went, how he hung on her words, and watched her as she worked. I remember she was embroidering a frock for her own little girl, and he was as much interested in its progress as she was. I cannot help lingering over this part of my story, but I must come to the close.



Such a happy fortnight they spent with us. My aunt so pleased with everything my mother had to show her, and saying such pleasant things of us, the house, the garden, and all her arrangements, as gave her home a fresh charm in my mother's eyes. Nor was this her only felicity. The great house of the parish, Mitchelmore Park, was vacant, and one object of the Leicesters' visit to us, was to see if it would suit them. For knowing how much happiness it would give his wife, and being also much attached himself to my father and mother, Mr. Leicester was willing to let his own place in Devonshire, and take another near us, if one could be procured.

So one day the whole party, we children and all, walked to the park, which was only about half-a-mile distant from the rectory, and whilst the elders went over the house, we were left to play in the garden, under charge of a nurse-maid. It was my mother's custom to come into the nursery every afternoon, and stay there whilst the servants went down to their tea. It was a half-hour we always looked forward to with great delight, as she generally brought some work with her, and told us stories, such charming fairy tales as we were never weary of hearing. Well, that day, as soon as we returned from our walk, she came as usual, bringing Aunt Mary with her, and instead of a fairy tale, Aunt Mary took me up on her lap, and said that she would tell us a story

which should be quite true ; and then in a pleasant way, which amused us greatly, she made a story out of our walk to the park, and told us that she and uncle Leicester were going to live there, and described such a bright and happy future for us all—how we were to meet every day, and be like one family. And presently she paused, and said more gravely to my mother, ‘I feel this kindness of Henry’s (that was my uncle’s name,) is quite a severe rebuke to me for having made myself so miserable when you went away last year.’

And struck with the sudden change in her voice, I looked up in her face, and saw the tears standing in her beautiful eyes.

‘I am sure, my dear Mary, he does not mean it so,’ my mother answered.

‘I know it,’ she said ; ‘he does it out of the purest love and goodness, as he would do anything else that he thought was for my happiness, without ever calling it a sacrifice. And that is what makes me so sorry that I should have teased him with complaints when you went away.’

Presently she added, after a little pause, ‘I would not let him do it, only I think it will be really for his happiness, and as he does it to please me, it would, you know, be ungracious not to be pleased.’

‘Would not let !’ my mother said, ‘a pretty way that for a wife to talk !’

'Oh!' my aunt smilingly answered, 'I knew you would not let that pass, but you know I am a spoilt young wife, and always have my own way.'

And again she made a little pause, and then burst out with, 'No one can know half Henry's goodness. No one but his wife could know. It grieves me to see that he shuts himself up so much from the world, that the world will never do him justice; so it seems incumbent on me who do know his worth, to honour him all the more, and, indeed, I feel that I can never be grateful enough for all his love and indulgence.'

I was too young to understand what she was saying, but Eleanor and Agnes were not, and I often heard them afterwards dwelling on her words. It was one of those glimpses into the hearts of their elders which children sometimes catch, and which makes a great impression upon them. I remember my sisters sitting on low stools beside my mother and opposite my aunt, and looking at her while she spoke with an expression of mingled awe and intelligence. A very few minutes after this my mother was called out of the room. A poor woman from the village wanted to speak to her, and taking Agnes and Edward she left Eleanor and the baby and me alone with my aunt. The baby, who had been hitherto asleep, woke up, and began to cry, and my aunt, putting me down, went to the cradle, and tried to rock the child off

to sleep again. Little Lucy was not, however, to be satisfied, so she went to the fire and began pouring some food which stood ready prepared on the hob into the baby's bottle; and how it happened, I knew not, but whilst standing there, her muslin dress caught fire. Eleanor and I were hanging over the cradle, but turning at the sound of her voice, beheld the flames already streaming up nearly to her head. We flew from the room to the head of the staircase, filling the house with our cries of distress, calling out for uncle Henry as often as for my father and mother.

My poor aunt, after vainly endeavouring to extinguish the flames herself, rushed out after us into the draughty passage to seek assistance. At that instant, my father and mother, Mr. Leicester and all the servants, came flying to help us from different parts of the house.

Mr. Leicester was first, and the change in his face when he saw his wife, a thousand years would not obliterate from my memory. It was convulsed with horror, and he actually lost every trace of resemblance to himself. He seemed to take the whole staircase from bottom to top at one bound, and his wife flew into his open arms as to a haven of safety; with a tender impetuosity, he threw her on the ground, and with my father's assistance, speedily extinguished the flames. But she lay quite still and insensible, so folded up in him, that neither he nor anyone else could see

her. His head was turned away, as if he feared to look upon her face. My mother ran to her dressing-room for restoratives, and to mix some goulard and water, which was then considered the proper thing to apply to burns. Terrified as she was, she yet spoke a word of hope to Mr. Leicester as she passed him. We children stood crying with fright; my father said, 'Come, Leicester, let me help you to carry her into her room, and then I will get on my horse and go for Mr. Morris. Don't despair; she has fainted from fear and pain; she will revive in a minute or two.'

Mr. Leicester acquiesced, but did not speak; but when he and my father raised my aunt, we all got a momentary glimpse of her, and oh! it was terrible to see the great red blisters on her beautiful hands and arms, and all up the side of her throat and face. Even where she was not burnt, she was all scorched and discoloured. A groan of unutterable despair burst from my poor uncle when he saw what havoc the fire had made in his beloved wife; and truly it was wonderful that in so short a time she could have been so much injured, but fire is a quick destroyer.

Had we been children in a book, we should doubtless have done more than our elders and betters in extinguishing the flames, but being only children in real life, I have a strong impression that we did nothing but cry and get in the way,

and that the moment any one could attend to us, we were very properly sent off to the nursery. We knew it not, but we had had our last glimpse of my aunt. From the moment she was carried through the door of her bed-room we saw her no more. For a time all our inquiries were answered by the assurance that she was 'better,' 'a little better,' but the terrible truth could not long be hidden from us; she had never revived, she was burnt to death. It was a sore stroke to my poor mother, and the day she actually expired, she shut herself up in her dressing-room, unable to see even her own children.

My father came into the nursery, and talked to us gravely and kindly. I cannot recollect much that he said, but Eleanor and Agnes cried a great deal, and so did Edward and I. I remember standing in the window and gazing into the clear blue sky, which was to me an actual visible Heaven, and thinking that Aunt Mary had gone up into that distant country where the stars lived, and where the sun and the moon hung so close to the ground, that they could be touched. My father spoke in a lower and softer voice than usual, and kissed us tenderly. He took our poor little motherless cousin up in his arms and said he would carry her to my uncle; perhaps he hoped that his child might rouse him out of his misery, but he soon brought her back again, she had done no good. Of course we children did not see him,

but from what the nurse-maids said to each other as they sat running the seams of our black frocks, we gathered that he passed hour after hour by the bed on which she was lying, like one whom sorrow had stupified. My mother went to him, and told him how his dear wife's last words and thoughts had been of him, and how gratefully she had acknowledged all his love and goodness to her; but still he made no sign, and though he saw her weeping bitterly, he shed no tear himself. In low voices the servants talked about his broken heart; in awe-struck whispers they discussed together the preparations for the funeral, which all at first supposed would have taken place at Mitchelmore. But no, Mr. Leicester roused himself at last; he would not hear of her being laid anywhere but in the tomb of his ancestors. He could not, he would not go back to Devonshire without her. To live close to her grave, and at last to join her in it, seemed the only desire he had left. My father tried to persuade him out of his purpose, but in vain, even he failed to move him, and was forced himself to give way. A hundred miles and more she was to be carried back to the home she had left in health and beauty little above a fortnight before. We saw the hearse standing at the door from the nursery window, and the two mourning-coaches, with their melancholy-looking black horses, in one of which my father and uncle travelled together, and in the other the nurse and

baby, and my poor aunt's maid. We caught a glimpse of Mr. Leicester in the hall when he was going away, and only a glimpse, for he did not speak to us—he could not. The hand of God was heavy on him, and his portly frame had shrunk beneath it, and his upright carriage beneath the burden of his affliction. His step was feeble as that of an old man, his hair was streaked with grey, and his face still wore something of the look of horror with which he had bounded up the stair-case. My mother hung weeping on his shoulders; she knew, and we all knew, that he never would enter the house again, and he never did. During the remainder of his life, which lasted some years, he shut himself up in his own house, refusing to see anyone, living almost entirely in two rooms, and keeping the shutters closed in all the others. He seemed, if one may say so, to live only to die, at least to have a kind of gloomy satisfaction in making his life as much like death as possible. He corresponded with my mother, and, strange to say, one of the most cheerful letters she ever received from him was to announce the death of his little girl. I have heard her often speak of it, and observe how the one idea of re-union with his wife had so absorbed every other feeling, that he could not take any interest or pleasure in the things of this present world. After seven dreary years of separation, he was buried close by her side, his love for her as



fervent in death, as it had ever been in life. Many people called him mad, but my father said that his shutting himself up in that manner was fully to be accounted for by his extreme shyness, aggravated as it was undoubtedly by the shock to his nerves, and the great depression of his spirits. He also said that he was at last wholly resigned and submissive, and it was a great comfort to my mother to hear him say so, as she had doubted whether such excessive sorrow might not partake of the sin of rebellion against the will of God ; and, indeed, though far be it from me to judge, it does seem to me that there must have been some ignorance of the purposes of this life of trial, or he could not thus have so indulged his grief as to cut himself off from all usefulness to others. Had he but made the exertion he would have been a happier man. His large property went to a younger brother, but he left to me some handsome pearls and a hundred pounds, and bequeathed to my mother a full-length portrait of his wife, painted by Romney. I remember its arrival at Mitchelmore, and my father's hanging it at the bottom of the drawing-room, and my mother looking on the while through her blinding tears. It had been painted soon after her marriage, and represented my aunt out of doors, with a back-ground of trees, and in a white robe with a blue ribbon round her waist, and another of the same tint mixed with her beautiful dark brown

hair. She was slightly leaning on a pedestal, and one fair delicate hand was raised to her face, the exquisite rosy fingers resting against the glowing cheek. Blushing and smiling, she looked at us from the canvas just as she had looked in life. Oh! we grew so fond of that picture! Eleanor, and Agnes, and I. But how I have rambled on since beginning my history. I thought I was going to write some account of our life in the nursery, and here I have filled a chapter with recollections of our elders and betters.

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## CHAPTER II.

## FEARS AND FANCIES.

My poor aunt's death was such a shock, that all who experienced it could not but suffer from it. I remember my mother's looking wan and pale for weeks afterwards, and even being confined to her chamber for some days. A horror of fire seemed to be impressed on us all; we were forbidden ever to approach nearer than the rug, and a new fender, higher than our heads, was procured for the nursery. My father also enjoined my mother never again to put on a thin muslin dress, or suffer us to wear such. Gradually, however, the effects of the accident wore off; but we children long continued to suffer from the shock to our nerves.

Perhaps we were rather unusually timid and excitable, and should have been subject to paroxysms of midnight terrors, had nothing happened to increase our natural nervousness. As it was, I well remember the agony of fear in which about this time we passed the earlier part of each night. I do not speak of Edward, who had a little room to himself within my father's dressing-room, but Eleanor, Agnes, and I, who occupied the same chamber, were for some weeks a perfect prey to imaginary terrors, almost too absurd for credence. By day we were by no manner of means particularly fearful; with the cows, dogs, horses, donkeys, and even pigs, about the place, we were on the most amicable terms. But no sooner was the sun gone down, and the mystery of darkness spread over the earth, than our panics began, our fears creeping like midnight shadows over our minds, and coming every evening as regularly as the twilight. I can laugh at them now, but at the time they were no laughing matter. Things which by day we never thought of being afraid of, by night were objects of our greatest terror. Amongst others, I remember a certain black leather portmanteau trunk, in which, I believe, some old school-books of my father's were stowed away, and which always remained under Eleanor and Agnes's bed. By day we would drag it out and sit upon it, finding it a more convenient height for our little table than the chairs; but by

night we would not have touched or even looked at it if we could have helped it. The fact was, the trunk had come underneath our bed we knew not how; we had found it there one day whilst playing at hide-and-seek. It was locked and strapped, and we had never seen it open, that was the whole mystery. One night we fancied that there was a noise in the room, and Eleanor in a tremulous whisper said it sounded as if it came from the great black trunk. In a moment our imaginations became possessed with the idea, that there was something monstrous locked up within it. The noise we heard, and which was in truth only the rustling of the sprays of jessamine and roses against our bed-room windows, seemed to increase in violence, as the pulsation of our hearts became more rapid, and our imagination became more excited. The trunk itself seemed to move, and we pictured to ourselves some frightful beast bursting out of its narrow prison and rushing out upon us. Then we could bear it no longer, and Agnes, though fearful of having her arm griped by the monster, stretched out her hand, and gently rang the bell, which hung beside her bed. The appearance of the nursemaid and the light restored us to our senses, and, half ashamed, we told her of our panics. She looked round the room, and underneath each bed, impatiently exclaiming, 'Why, there is nothing but the old portmanty trunk. I cannot think whatever has

come to you children, to make you so foolish? And with that she went out of the room, taking the light with her, and leaving us just as much as ever alone, and with the mysterious trunk, and in the dark. Still, the fact of her having come in seemed to have done us good, and we generally went to sleep soon after she left us.

But every night the same terrors had to be gone through; sometimes, indeed, we weathered the storm without ringing the bell, but lay in patient endurance until my father and mother came up-stairs to bed, when, knowing that if we screamed they must hear us, we felt, as it were, protected by them, and, therefore, comparatively safe. Still the bell rang so often, that the nurse at last complained to my mother, who, with her usual indulgence, decreed that we should no longer be left in the darkness, but have a lantern; hoping thereby to save us from any further panics, and trusting that as we grew older and stronger, we should grow wiser.

And for a time the lantern succeeded, and we slept in peace; but, alas! one night we had a fit of fear worse than any we had yet experienced. We had been in bed nearly an hour, and ought, doubtless, to have been asleep; but Eleanor had been telling us a story all of her own invention, and very delightful it was; full of kings, and queens, and dukes, and princes, with whom in those days we were on the most familiar terms,

when suddenly her voice died away, and in accents of terror she exclaimed, 'Look! look! what is that on the wall?' We looked, and beheld the shadow of some hideous creature, that was neither beast, fish, nor fowl, creeping along the wall near the ceiling. All along, opposite the bed, we watched it moving, but when it reached a certain point on the other side, just as we thought it on its road to us, it disappeared. We had hardly time to draw a long breath and glance fearfully round the room, where, of course, there was nothing to be seen, when again we saw it come out of the wall, over the fire-place, and commence its wondrous journey; exactly over the same space, and along the same road it passed, and exactly on the same spot it disappeared. Cold drops of fear hung on each brow, and if we did not scream, it was only because excessive terror had taken away our voices. There was one instant of intense suspense, during which we doubted whether or not it were gone. But no; after precisely the same interval, it re-appeared on precisely the same spot, and traversed precisely the same path. Three, four, five, six, times we watched its progress in speechless agony. Human nature could bear it no longer; with one accord, actuated by one common impulse, we sprang from our warm beds, and rushed out of the room to the head of the stair-case, calling for my father with all our might. He and my mother came instantly,

and frightened indeed they were to see us three little white trembling figures with pale faces standing close together for safety. Carried out of ourselves by our fears, we exclaimed, 'Oh! Papa, Papa! come here, there is a wild beast in our room, there is indeed!' and our voices betrayed too much earnestness for laughter.

'My dear children, what do you mean?' he asked; whilst my mother exclaimed, 'You will catch your deaths of cold, dears, standing here; come back and get into bed, and then tell us all about it.'

'Oh, no, no!' we cried, 'we cannot go back into that room; there is a wild beast in it, there is indeed!' and I added, 'Won't you take your sword, Papa, and kill it?'

'I will get my sword if I need it,' my father answered, smiling a little. 'You will not be afraid to come back with me, I am sure;' and he and my mother walked on towards the door of our room, and we were soon in our haunted chamber again. There was the rushlight burning dimly in the lantern, dotting the walls and floor with large circular spots of light, but there was nothing else to be seen. My father looked round, and was just about to speak, when, lo and behold, on the wall above the fire-place, the same shadow suddenly appeared. Pointing to it with our fingers we burst into tears, and were about to rush out of the room again, when my mother caught me up

in her arms; and my father, laying his hands on Eleanor and Agnes, ordered them to stand still. 'I am here,' he said. 'You know that you are safe.'

We all, therefore, remained watching the spectre, and I think my mother was herself somewhat alarmed, when my father, who had stood for half a second with a slightly puzzled expression, broke into a short laugh, and walking up to the lantern, stooped down, and took from the edge of it a common earwig!

'Here is your wild beast,' he said, showing it us in his hand. 'Nothing but a poor little earwig, which the rushlight magnified until it had lost all resemblance to itself. 'Not quite necessary to have a sword to kill it, eh? little May!'

For a moment we were doubtful; but so it was; an earwig running round and round the top of the lantern, had been the sole cause of our terrors! Convinced, but still trembling, we crept back to our beds, feeling very cold and very much ashamed of ourselves.

'I think, my dear,' said my mother, 'I shall sit here a little while with the children.'

'Very well,' my father answered, 'and you had better spend the time in giving them a lecture for being so silly. It is fortunate that they are all little girls. If they were boys I should be ashamed of them.'

He did not, however, speak angrily, and my



mother sat by us until we fell asleep. I suppose she afterwards told him how we had been in the habit of suffering from such panics, for the next day (though not without a mild rebuke) he promised us that he would come in every night in his way to his sleeping-room, and see that all was safe. We thought it very kind of him, and went to sleep in the sweet conviction that his promised visit secured our safety; and I believe that for years he never once forgot to enter our chamber on his way to his own.

My mother also talked to us about our fancies, told us of the angels that watched over us, and said we must struggle against such fears, because they were distrustful of God's mercy, gently reminding us that darkness was no darkness with Him, and that we were as much in His keeping at one time as at another. She taught me some verses, which she recommended me to repeat every night after I was in bed; and to this hour, in the simple words my mother taught me, I nightly commend myself to the gracious keeping of God.

There was a period of my life when I broke through the habit as too childish; I had lost all horror of the darkness; it was no longer in my mind connected with perils and dangers, and I thought such fancies superstitious folly. But now I am, in a manner, come back to the faith of my childhood, and know that as light is ever in

Scripture connected with God, so is there a mysterious union between darkness and Satan. So the little hymn learnt as a child, and which once seemed to me so childish, now seems to be fraught with a deep philosophy, and I know that as a child I never understood it. I have said that by daylight we were not particularly timid children, nor in many respects were we, but we were always singularly open to all impressions on the imagination.

We had, as all children have, a strong love of the marvellous, the mysterious, and the horrible. At the back of our wood walk was a small coppice, a charming place for wild strawberries and wild flowers, nightingales and birds' nests, and in which we often spent the greater part of a summer's afternoon. A hole in the edge gave us free access to it, and we were allowed to go there by ourselves. For a long time it was an unalloyed pleasure, but one day, when passing through with the nursemaids, we unluckily heard some fragments of their conversation. We were passing by a pretty dell there was at the upper end, partially overgrown with hazels and blackberries, when they began talking of something that had happened there. I knew not what, but the few words we heard (for they spoke low, which heightened the mystery,) were about somebody's having been buried in it. From that hour the wood became to us a haunted

spot, and our enjoyment when there was greatly injured. Still, in spite of our fears, its treasures of flowers, strawberries, and nuts, tempted us into it, and throughout the summer months there was no place where we were so frequently to be found. And who can wonder? for there grew the first primroses, with their short stalks and scanty leaves; the earliest violets, pink, blue, and white; and by-and-by, when warmer days came on, the ground was all enamelled with the silvered starred anemone and sapphire hyacinth; who can wonder that we could not keep away from such a treasury? We are told that the man who has no music in his soul is ripe for treasons, murders, and a goodly list of sins; and surely he who can walk unmoved amongst the vernal beauties of the spring, must have a kindred spirit. Go into a coppice towards the end of May, and yield yourself up to the sweet influences of Nature; put your hands into the long tangled grass, and you will feel them moistened with the fragrant warm breath of the earth. Gaze for a moment on the beauties that surround you; the young transparent leaves, the silvery stems, the pliant hazels, through whose groves the eye can wander ever on and find no end; the golden moss which covers up their roots, the rich mosaic work of flowers, not here or there a solitary blossom, but flowers by the thousand, until the ground is literally dyed with their profusion! Do you not feel an

almost irresistible impulse to cast yourself upon the earth, as if you would embrace it; a love for all the beauty round you so ardent, that nothing short of clasping them to your heart can satisfy it? And as if this fair scene were not loveliness enough to make us grateful, from amongst those interminable hazel thickets, come floating all around us the nightingale's disjointed liquid tones, fragments of melodies so exquisite, they might be angels' songs—now rising into a gush of swift, passionate music, and anon sinking into one oft-repeated long-drawn note of most surpassing sweetness! How often when my heart has been overpowered by such moments, have I said, 'And this is only earth, doomed to destruction, cursed, blighted, fallen from its pristine loveliness, and yet so fair! What, then, will be the loveliness of heaven, and, oh! with what transports of delight shall we behold it?' But why should I labour to utter what good Bishop Heber has so much better expressed in one of his simple hymns:—

' Oh, God, oh Good, beyond compare,  
If thus Thy meaner works are fair,  
If thus Thy bounties gild the span  
Of ruined earth and sinful man;  
How glorious must those mansions be,  
Where Thy redeemed shall dwell with Thee!'

And, besides, I am wandering far away from the days of my childhood, and yet not even in child-

hood were we wholly insensible to such sylvan charms, only we had many associations with the coppice which older and wiser people could not have. It was a kind of fairy land to us; whenever we read of fair damsels being lost, and kings' sons hunting in a wood, we always laid the scene in our own dear thickets. And there, too, lived other things less pleasant—ogres, giants, hideous old witches, and the wolf that ate up little Red Riding Hood.

There was one story more identified with our coppice in my mind than any other; wherefore, I cannot say. It was one my dear mother often told us, and, as I have never seen it in print, or met with any other children who were acquainted with it, I am inclined to think it was all her own invention. Some part of it certainly was, for she had a pretty playful fancy, and many a time told us tales which she made up out of her own head. I will set this down here, though I have but an imperfect recollection of it. I remember that it was about a poor man and his wife who lived in a wood, and had no children. The man earned his livelihood by keeping the forest in order, cutting down the trees, repairing the fences, and trimming the various paths. One evening he came back from his work carrying a bundle in his arms, which he gave to his wife, and on opening it she found it contained a beautiful baby only a few weeks old, most curiously and richly dressed, his

little robe being wrought all over with some quaint device in gold. All she could learn from her husband was, that he had found the child in the hollow of a tree that he was about to cut down. But the next day she went to the lord of the castle to inquire if anyone there had lost such a child, but no one would own him. So the forester and his wife kept him, which they were right glad to do, and brought him up as their own, and he thrived and grew into a boy of most rare loveliness. Years passed, the child was strong, and tall, and active, full of health and vigour; but he never spoke; no word of question or reply ever passed his lips, or if he uttered anything, it was nothing more than 'Lost, lost, lost!' like Lord Cranstoun's goblin page. Sometimes he would sit for hours at the foot of some tree, looking out into the forest with large round wondering eyes, as if he could see miles and miles away, and with his little arms folded upon his breast, would mutter 'Lost, lost, lost!' over and over again, as if there was some mystery in his own mind which those words of melancholy inquiry might possibly solve. No answer, however, ever dropped from the sky, or came from tree or shrub to satisfy his doubts. As soon as he was old enough, he went out with the forester to gather up chips, whilst the latter worked in the wood. One evening, whilst they were all three seated at supper, they heard some one shouting

loudly in the distance. They went to the door and looked out, but it was already twilight, and there was little to be seen, excepting here and there the silver stem of some Lady of the Woods. But the voice came nearer and nearer, and with a sound as of some one striding through the forest, crunching the leaves beneath his feet, and pushing the branches aside. But still they could not make out what was said. The boy put up his hand to his ear to listen more attentively, and seemed to be straining his eyes to make out something in the darkness; and after a moment he shouted the words 'Lost, lost, lost!' The last syllable had hardly passed his lips, when a voice close beside them called aloud, 'Little Ricardo, Little Ricardo!'

'That is me!' said the boy, turning to the forester and his wife, and without any other farewell, he rushed away into the wood, and never was seen again. But this conclusion was so unsatisfactory to us, that my mother invented a sequel, in which he re-appeared riding a grey pony, clad in a green velvet coat, and hat with scarlet feather, the only circumstance, however, which I recollect of her continuation.

One summer's day, when we had all gone into the wood for strawberries, we agreed to separate, two going one way, and two another, that we might more thoroughly search the coppice, and see which party could get the largest basket-full.

Edward went off with Eleanor, and Agnes and I rambled on together. We were very successful in our search, and without much thinking where we were going moved on from thicket to thicket, carefully looking amongst the long grass for the fruit. I had been separated from Agnes a few minutes, when I heard her voice calling me.

‘Oh, May,’ she exclaimed, ‘look here! Did you ever see such beauties, and so many of them too! Here is work for both in this bed.’

I came and looked, and saw, indeed, a bed of most tempting strawberries, but, alas! we found ourselves on the very edge of the dell we so carefully avoided, and all the finest fruit was growing down its southern side out of our reach. Agnes looked at me and I looked at Agnes, and both drew back a step.

‘We must get them, May,’ Agnes said in a resolute voice, ‘and then we shall be sure to have more than Nelly and Edward. Come, it is broad daylight, nothing will hurt us. I will go if you will!’

I made a feeble remonstrance, but she began scrambling down, and I reluctantly followed. We gathered the strawberries in silence, shuddering as we thought of that mysterious something which was said to be buried at the bottom. At last I whispered, ‘You won’t go all the way down, will you, Agnes?’

‘No,’ she said in the same low tone, ‘we have



enough now, we will go back.' And we began to reascend the sides of the dell, but when we were about half way up, I set my foot on a stone, which slipped from under me, and down I rolled to the very bottom. That would have been bad enough; but oh! horror of horrors! when I rose from the ground I found I had been thrown upon a dead cat, which had been lying there unperceived until then. The fright and disgust which came over me were so great, that I could hardly stand, and I turned so pale, that Agnes thought I was fainting. Our earnest desire, however, to get out of that dreadful place kept me from doing so, and with very shaky knees I scrambled up the bank after her. We soon joined Eleanor and Edward, and in our eagerness to tell what had happened quite forgot to compare our baskets. Eleanor shuddered when she heard it, but Edward declared that he should set off immediately, and go to the bottom of the dell, and see whether the cat that was lying there was our great black-and-white Tom, who had been missing for some time. As nothing that we could say would dissuade him from going, we agreed to wait where we were until he returned; and I believe we thought that to go off alone to the bottom of the dell was as gallant a feat as had ever been performed by fairy prince or knightly cavalier. He soon came running back, declaring that it certainly was our 'poor dear great Tom,' he knew him by

the black patch over one of his eyes, and so he had brought back a few of his whiskers to keep. He sadly wanted us all three to come with him and see that he was not mistaken, and said with a very manly air that he would take care of us. But, though we greatly admired his courage and spirit, he could not prevail on us to imitate it, and we persisted in our determination to walk soberly home.

I cannot close this chapter of fears and fancies without relating a legend connected with Mitchelmore, which, unless I set it down in these pages, will soon become extinct; but which, nevertheless, when I was a child, every man, woman, boy, and girl about the place was familiar with. I think it is a pity that the next generation should lose the wholesome lesson of mercy it is calculated to teach; and having no faith in cruelty's ceasing from the earth whilst men are men and boys are boys, would fain do what little lies in my power to preserve a tradition, which proved, if nothing more, at least a local check to such sin.

In the middle of one of the meadows adjoining the turnpike road, there stood in my youth a handsome and very aged sycamore, which, year after year, instead of bearing green leaves after the manner of other trees, dressed itself in a kind of dingy red. The meadow in which the tree stood was called Pilgrims, from the immense number of people who formerly came from all

parts of the neighbourhood to see it. I can testify to the fact of the leaves having certainly a reddish tint, which, when the sun shone on them, made them look positively red, much redder than even beech trees usually are in the autumn, and, also, that in this respect it differed materially from all the other sycamores in the county.

About three or four miles beyond Mitchelmore the character of the country changes, and instead of woody hedge-rows, water meadows, and cultivated fields, you gradually ascend to a high ridge of bleak, desolate-looking common. As far as the eye can stretch there is not even a fence to break the monotony of the surface, nor any other sign of the handiwork of man than the smooth, wide turnpike road, which, winding up where the hills are least steep, is at last lost in the distance. I speak of things as they were; doubtless now much of this desolate tract has been brought into cultivation. On this common, years ago, was annually held an immense fair, such a fair as we have no idea of, that lasted for days, that the gentry, far and near, used to drive into, in their cumbrous carriages, and gala-dresses, and which was regarded by all classes, either for gaiety or commerce, as the great event of every summer. People filled their houses for it as they do now for a country ball, and found it as pleasant and useful a vehicle of society as picnics, or archery, or any other modern amusement. I have heard

my mother say, that in its palmiest days it must have collected thousands. A whole city of canvas grew up in the night, and in the morning the bare bleak common was rich with every kind of merchandise, and loaded with the fruits of the earth. Whole streets of booths were occupied by the leading tradespeople of the neighbouring towns, nor did London itself disdain to send its representatives. Fancy this canvas city crowded with all classes, from the elegans and elegantes of the day, down to the lowest race of vagabonds; and then the herds of cattle, flocks of sheep, the droves of horses, donkeys, pigs, until the common seemed all alive with life, in some shape or another.

For days and days before the fair took place, the roads and lanes were rendered quite unsafe by the troops of gipsies, pedlars, showmen, and rogues of every description, by which they were thronged; to say nothing of their being lumbered up with caravans, carts, huge unwieldy hop wagons, with bells to all their horses, and, in short, every possible kind of conveyance, all wending their way to the same scene of gaiety and traffic. I have often heard my mother apologize for a tardy visit by saying, 'but you know at this fair-time one cannot go out.' Nor was it fit or safe for ladies to do so; for it proved, of course, an attraction to all the vagabonds of the country,

who marked their progress by a series of depredations and impertinences as they passed along.

More than two centuries ago, amongst the thousands journeying onward to that inland fair, there was a kind of pedlar, or, it might be, smuggler, who carried his goods, packed in a large bundle, on the back of a donkey. One summer's day he left his home on the southern coast, and, with more merchandise than usual, set off on his toilsome journey. Avoiding the turnpike roads, he travelled on through solitary lanes and footpaths, so intricate that it was a wonder how he found his way. All through the New Forest, and up the steep hills beyond, he and his donkey struggled on together. But a donkey's pace is but slow; the weather was oppressively hot, the package was uncommonly heavy, and somehow or another, their progress fell far short of its usual rate. He had allowed three days for the journey, but the third ended, and they were still many and many a long mile from their destination, and unless he reached the spot ere the close of the next day, he well knew that the best part of his customers would be gone, for he looked principally to the gentry to buy his stock, which, in truth, consisted of such contraband goods as French silks, gloves, ribbons, handkerchiefs, &c. Enraged at the thought of his profits being diminished by the dilatoriness of the poor brute, he swore he would travel all night rather than not

reach the fair in time. Instead, therefore, of putting up at his usual baiting-place, he only halted for about an hour, during which he took very good care to refresh himself with plenty of liquor and food, whilst the poor donkey had only a scanty meal.

The heavy package was soon strapped on the animal's back again, and they set off, but already weary with a hard day's work, he moved more slowly than ever. With many a cruel blow and bitter curse the pedlar urged him on, nor did his own fatigue make him bestow a thought on that of his companion. Once only in the course of that toilsome night he halted for a few minutes, and allowed the poor beast to lie down on the grass by the road-side. But in a few minutes he roused him up, and they proceeded on their journey. Soon the sun rose, the birds woke up, the flowers raised their heads, and shook out all their leaves into the fresh morning air, and the only weary things in all the world seemed the pedlar and his donkey. Still, however, on they plodded, and more and more quickly fell the blows on the poor beast as his pace grew from exhaustion slower and slower; his feeble gait, his drooping head, his dull patient eye, in which there was such a look of suffering, might have warned his cruel master to allow another and a longer rest.

They had reached Mitchelmore, and the man knew now that he should be in plenty of time;

but rendered more savage and obstinate than usual, by having lost his own night's rest, he would keep on.

The path that they were travelling, led them close beneath the sycamore tree, and just as they reached it, the donkey dropped upon the earth from sheer weariness. His master seized upon the bridle, and whilst kicking him with his heavily-nailed boot, strove to pull him up again. The poor creature struggled to obey, and raised himself upon his knees, but sank again beneath his burden, just as a crushing blow, descending on his head, made him make one last convulsive effort. It was, however, in vain, he could not rise, and could only turn his head towards his master in a mute appeal for mercy. Mercy, however, there was none in that cruel soul. Every blow he inflicted seemed only to add to his fury, until, at last, mad with rage at what he called the donkey's obstinacy, he dragged the unhappy beast close to the sycamore tree, tied him up to it, and beat him there to death. Some villagers passing by on their way to the fair, beheld him standing over his victim, and stopping, asked the reason of his inhuman conduct. Ashamed to answer, for the sight of death had sobered him, the pedlar strapped the package on to his own shoulders, and shrank away, and they say, that to avoid passing by the same spot, he went many miles round on his return home. But he could not fly

from his sin ; the fame of his evil deed spread far and wide ; the sycamore which had received into its roots the bruised body of the poor beast, in testimony of God's abhorrence of such cruelty, changed the tint of its leaves from green to crimson. Hundreds and hundreds of pilgrims came annually to behold this manifestation of the divine displeasure, and to pray that they might never be hurried into similar acts by avarice, or anger, or intemperance.

I wish the tree were standing now to repeat its wholesome lesson to this and all succeeding generations ; but unhappily the number of people who turned aside to see it, damaged the grass of the meadow so much, that the present tenant, having less faith or more love of gain than his predecessors, prevailed on the proprietor to cut it down, and so the noble sycamore fell a sacrifice to the utilitarian spirit of the age ; and I suppose that few will now believe that it ever existed. Yet we all saw it as children, and the legend was in every one's mouth. I remember a conversation between my father and mother on the subject, the latter expressing her firm conviction of its truth, and the former speaking doubtfully, but inclining to belief. He said that it had often struck him that there was something very remarkable in the manner in which the animal creation was spoken of in Holy Scripture.

He would instance their being included in the



covenant God made with man after the deluge. 'And the bow shall be in the cloud, and I will look on it, that I may remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is upon the earth.' And again, in the Psalms, there are many very striking passages, such as, 'Thou, Lord, shalt save both man and beast. How excellent is thy mercy, O God: and the children of men shall put their trust under the shadow of Thy wings.' He would not, he added, say anything on the well-known story of Balaam, but in the book of Jonah there was a very remarkable instance of their importance in the sight of their Maker; for He ordered the cattle to observe the fast as well as the inhabitants of Nineveh, and that they, like their masters, should be girded with sackcloth; and, finally, He gave as one additional reason for His sparing the city, that there was much cattle in it.

He told us that about sixty years before his time, some one had left a small sum of money to have a sermon preached annually in the parish on the subject of cruelty to animals, but that within his own memory the trustees of the money had agreed that it should be spent instead, in a gift of bread to a certain number of poor. And to this day, the people of Mitchelmore receive what they call the 'Donkey's Gift.'

## CHAPTER III.

## SIR HUMPHREY LISLE AND THE PET SQUIRREL.

IT must have been towards the end of 1802 that we lost our grandmother Mrs. Lisle. I have a very very dim recollection of her, never having seen her, to my knowledge, but once, and that was in very early childhood. I remember her as a cheerful, sprightly old woman, with a very high nose, and bright large grey eyes, in a stiff slate-coloured gown, a snow-white mob cap, which met under her chin, and was bound round her head with a piece of black ribbon. I also recollect that she was occupied in making a patch-work quilt, which had a lovely green and red parrot in the centre, and which now, having come into my possession, I nightly sleep beneath. And a wonderful specimen of skill it is, not a careless, vulgar compound of odds and ends, but a delicate lady-like, tasty piece of work, the pattern being a simple hexagon on a light ground, with a deep bordering of the darkest and richest colours.

My father and mother, who were both of them much attached to her, often tried to persuade her to come and live with us at Mitchelmore, but she always declined. She had still the strength, as she said, to perform her own little round of duties

in her own home, and amongst those to whom she had been used the greater part of her life, and she had rather stay where she was. She had the boys with her in the holidays, and God always, and she was not afraid. And so, with a firm and vigorous step, she continued to walk cheerfully forward, and laid herself willingly down to die, thanking her heavenly Father for the blessings of this life, and strong in the hope of the mercies to come. She died where she had lived for upwards of fifty years, at New Court, the family seat of the Lisles. From the day on which she had entered the house as a bride, to the day she was carried out of it as a corpse, she had never left it, excepting for one or two very brief visits. People, in her time, were contented to stay quietly in their own homes, and did not spend half their lives in 'running to and fro upon the earth.'

The 'boys' who lived with my grandmother were the two sons of General Lisle. He left them with her when he went out to India, which he did so soon after the death of my grandfather, as to make her removal from New Court unnecessary and undesirable. But you must not imagine that because New Court is called 'new,' that it was by any means a modern place. It was only new in comparison with a much older house said to have been erected on the same spot in the reign of Henry VI. The present building dates no further back than the reign of James I. In

these days, when knowledge of all kinds may truly be said to be increased on the earth, it would be needless to describe the mansion. We are as familiar with the exterior of James the First's houses as with those of our own times ; but one or two peculiarities I may be permitted to mention. In the first place, there was a large court in front, through which you drove up to the door. On either side of the handsome iron gates by which you entered, were two pilasters of brick, with stone capitals, and upon them stood two statues, representing men in armour, bearing in their arms the family shield, argent on a bend gules, a sword proper, and on their helmeted heads the same weapon was displayed, grasped by a gauntleted hand, whilst the motto, 'For the weak,' was engraved on the stones at their feet. On each side of the steps which led down to the front door, the same impressive figures stood sentry, ending the balustrade which stretched from wing to wing, inclosing another court, very small, and paved with black-and-white marble. One other remarkable feature was the unusual excellence of the brick-work. There was scarcely the faintest thread of white mortar visible, so admirably were the bricks joined, while the face of the house and walls was as even as if formed of a single stone, and the smallness of the bricks and the absence of the mortar, gave to the buildings an air of the most beautiful finish and neatness.

Most families of any antiquity have their own stock of legends. We were not deficient in that respect; and very fond I used to be in my youth of hearing the histories of the powdered ladies in pink brocade, and the ringleted ladies in grey satin and pearls, or of the gay-looking gentlemen in sky-blue with swords by their sides, or those dressed in puritanical black, with stiff ruffs round their necks. Amongst the latter was one grim-looking ancestor, who had drawn his sword in the great Rebellion on the side of the Parliament, and beside him hung his daughter, a gentle-looking lady, in a sad-coloured robe. It is said that he never forgave her for having saved the life of a royalist foe.

He was out with Cromwell, and Mistress Eveline Lisle was left at New Court with but a slender retinue, for all that part of the country held for the Parliament, and so no one thought of there being any danger. It happened one summer evening, that whilst Mistress Eveline was walking in the garden, which was, like everything else at New Court, inclosed with a stout brick wall, she was startled by a sudden noise among the branches of a tree which grew close to a little 'gateway; and, in another moment, some one on the outside swung himself up into the boughs, and then dropped on the turf at her feet. He lay there panting like one who had run fast and far, his rich dress, albeit, sadly tarnished and torn, proclaimed him a Cava-

lier, and there was a wild famished look in his eyes and face which went to the lady's heart. When he could speak, he told her that he had been flying two days before a party of Parliament men, who were even then close at his heels, and sorely he prayed her for the dear love of God to save him. The lady was all of a tremble with fear for him and herself, but she bade him rise up and follow her, and she led him by a walk, which wound along under some dark yew trees up to the house ; all the time as they went looking this way and that, lest any one should spy out her strange companion. But twilight was coming on, and the yew trees cast a friendly gloom over their path, and so they reached the house in safety. She left him crouching down in the shadow, while she went in through a side-door, and up a narrow back stair-case into her own chamber, to see that the coast was clear. When she found that there was no one about, she returned and again bade him follow her, and so she brought him unperceived into the house. Now within the lady's bed-chamber there was a large dark cupboard, and under the floor of the cupboard was a wide, deep hole, capable of containing a man easily, and which, indeed, was said to have been made for that very purpose. Here Mistress Eveline concealed the unhappy Cavalier, dropping with her own hand the flooring over him after he had let himself down, so that no one, saving herself, knew

he was there. That evening she had her supper served in her own chamber, that she might share it with her captive; and hardly had they finished it, ere the party of rebels who were in search of the Lord Kesteven, arrived at the house, and demanded admission. She dared show no reluctance, for they were her father's friends, and personally she had nothing to fear from them; so when they demanded leave to search for Lord Kesteven, she could not choose but grant it. They could not, however, have searched the house very thoroughly, for they failed to find him, but they passed the night there, and it was not until late the next day that she found a fitting opportunity of releasing her prisoner. He did not, however, unfortunately for her, leave the house as secretly as he had entered it, for one of the servants saw him as they were stealing down the narrow staircase. It was too late to prevent the escape of Lord Kesteven, or at least, if any of the household turned out to retake him, they did not succeed; but when Sir Humphrey Lisle came back, he was told of Mistress Eveline's misdemeanour, and a wrathful man was he; for he was a stern, hard man, who, albeit a dissenter at heart, and a rebel in conduct, allowed no rebellion against his own authority, and no dissension from the creed which he had imposed on his children and followers. So he locked his daughter up for a year and a day, and, as tradition saith, never for-

gave her. I believe it unfortunately happened that he and Lord Kesteven were personal enemies. One thing this unrelenting old Puritan did, worthy, I think, in itself of admiration. He caused to be carved on a wooden scroll, placed over the centre door-way of the great hall, in large fair letters, the words, 'As for me and my household, we will serve the Lord.' And yet, perhaps, it was that very text which made him so harshly punish poor sad Mistress Eveline; for, according to his view of the matter, the saving a Malignant's life was entirely inconsistent with 'serving the Lord.' But enough of Sir Humphrey. The text he put up still stands over the same door-way, and, I trust, has preached to his descendants a doctrine far different from his.

The death of my grandmother made it necessary that my cousin should come to us, but William, who had already a commission, had scarcely arrived before he received orders to join his regiment, and we, in consequence, knew little of him for some years. He served in Spain, and whatever other faults he had, want of spirit was not amongst them, for he proved himself an especially brave and active officer, and enjoyed a fair share of that glory which this world so justly awards to gallant exploits. He was very handsome, and many people thought him handsomer than Charles; we never could, not even when he stood before us in all the brilliancy of scarlet and gold, and the other in his



plain black suit; and yet we thought it a fine thing to be allowed to walk out with cousin William, and I almost fancied that it made me an inch or two taller to have such a relation. Not that he ever troubled himself about us, for, indeed, with the exception of an occasional pat on the head to Edward, who particularly disliked that mode of salutation, and now and then speaking to Eleanor, he never took any notice of any of us; but I had a vague notion that it was nearly as grand a thing to have an officer staying in the house, as it would have been to have had an archbishop.

William was exactly at the age when human nature is too weak to support a red coat, and his head was certainly greatly affected by his. Such airs as he gave himself to all the parish, would soon have disgusted everybody, had he outstayed the eclat of his striking appearance, but fortunately he was only with us a fortnight, and when he next came he had grown more rational.

Both my cousins were tall. William was within an inch of the same height as my father, and Charles, though two years younger than his brother, not very much shorter. Ah! if we could only have given him also a scarlet coat, we should have been perfectly happy; but there seemed no chance of our ever enjoying the satisfaction of seeing him in such a dress, for it was his own wish, as well as the wish of his family, that he should

take Holy Orders. He had not yet left the college of Wellsbury, but his career there had been so satisfactory, that everyone predicted he would distinguish himself at Oxford. He was most unusually intellectual, but was haunted by a sense of bodily weakness, that, he used to say, kept him from setting his affections on anything earthly.

He was a great devourer of books, catching up their contents with a wonderful facility, and retaining them with the clearness of long and careful study; my mother used often to be obliged to drive him out, or he would have sat reading all day. I remember how he would look up at her summons, with the deep flush on his cheek, and his brow slightly contracted, and his hazel eye with a world of thought in its radiance, and slowly put away his books at her bidding. I think we children were of use in drawing him out, for we often coaxed him into taking a walk with us. Ah! those were such happy days!

Out of his mind poured thoughts, fancies, scraps of poetry, romantic stories, facts, theories, feelings, which, though we could not half appreciate, charmed our imaginations, and stimulated our minds. Then to play with him was so delightful, not regular games, but unpremeditated gambols, little frolics, which were indulged in because the spirits were light, and the sun was shining, and the sense of enjoyment must find a vent. And there was such a gracefulness about everything

he did ; such a gentleness in his touch, that he never played with us roughly, much less rudely. Something of the courtesy of the high-bred gentleman was apparent even to his little cousins, and to my mother his manner was perfect, perfect in its attentive tenderness, its sweet genuine devotion. My father used laughingly to call him her page, and say he was a courtier in all things save in insincerity. She called him her Sir Charles Grandison, but, Oh ! when I read that book, I thought the far-famed hero of Richardson's wanted the ease and spirit of our Sir Charles. Even old Rodney, though so savage to us that we could not go near him, loved him with all the fervour of his canine nature.

Charles had an inexhaustible imagination, and told us tales as endless as those of the Arabian Nights, one story springing out of another, until we ourselves could scarcely remember the beginning. Whenever he walked with us, he was always entreated to go on with his 'plays,' as we called them. Delightful as we thought them then, all, save a remnant of one, have been forgotten, and that has survived only because connected with other things.

Like most other children, we were extremely fond of pet animals, had cats, and rabbits, and birds, and dormice, most of whom came to some untimely end. Amongst others, there was a squirrel, which we kept in the garden chained to a

tree, with a little house at the foot of the same wherein to pass the nights. It was a new possession, and we were excessively fond of it. Strictly speaking, it was my property, having been given me by Edward's dear friend, Will Wild, the carter; however, we all fed it, and spoke of it as our squirrel. One day it happened that Charles was standing by whilst we were feeding it, and expressed the greatest sympathy with the poor little creature's frantic efforts to get away. He tried to persuade me to let it loose, but it was, as I have said before, a new possession, and I persisted that I should tame it in time, and then it would be very happy, and could by no manner of means be induced to give it back its liberty. That afternoon he told us a delightful story about a squirrel, which entirely changed the destiny of mine. I wish I could recollect it all, but I cannot, the opening, however, I do remember.

'There was once,' he said, 'a squirrel who was so very greedy, that all the nuts of the woods were not enough to satisfy him, and he used nightly to make excursions into the king's garden to enjoy the beautiful fruits which grew there. He went so often, and ate so much, that at last the gardener could bear it no longer, and set a trap for him. He set it amongst the branches of a delicious pear tree, and that very night the unhappy squirrel was caught. In vain he tried to get away, the more he struggled the tighter grew the strings around

his paws. In vain he lifted up his little shrill voice and called for help, the birds who were roosting in the tree were all fast asleep, and the squirrels were all far away in the woods. The flies and the bees who swarmed about the fruit as soon as the sun rose, would have helped him if they could, but had not the power, and he found he had nothing to expect but a violent and painful death. By-and-by the gardener came, and as soon as he saw the squirrel, he exclaimed, "Ah, you rogue, so I have caught you, have I?" and taking him in his hands, he was just on the point of killing him, when the little princess came running up to him, and begged that the squirrel might be given to her. So the gardener gave him to her, and she had a golden collar made for him, and tied him up to the tree by a silver cord, and she gave him a mother-of-pearl dish to eat out of, and even more fruit than he could devour. At first the squirrel was so thankful not to be killed, that he seemed almost happy; but after a little time he began trying to get away, and tugging at his silver chain with all his might. "I love you very much, squirrel," the little princess said, "but I shall not let you go, and so you must try and be contented, but you shall have plenty of fruit to eat, all the nicest that grows in the garden."

'But the poor squirrel could care nothing at all about the fruit now, he sat up, and wrang his

little bony hands, and said, "Oh, let me go back to the woods ; if you had ever jumped about from branch to branch, you would know then the grief of being chained up, and sitting all day on the ground."

'But the little princess would not let him go ; every day she came and talked to him, and told him how much she loved him, and every day he said, "Oh, let me go into the woods again." One evening, when she looked out of the window of her chamber, she heard him moaning under the tree, and saying to himself, "Oh, when shall I sit again amongst the fragrant branches of the fir-trees, when shall I chace again the golden sun-beam through the forest boughs ? Never again, never again—break my heart, or break my chain !"

'Then the little princess wept, and she hurried into the garden, and unclasping his golden collar, she said, "You are free, free, free as the breeze ; I will keep you no more from your dear fir-trees."

'The happy squirrel bounded up amidst the branches ; but then he paused, and peering down through the leaves with his bright eyes, he said, "Dear Princess, if ever you are in trouble, and trouble may come to you as it has come to me, only call me, and I will try and help you."

'But the princess said, "It is not likely that a poor little creature like you should be able to help me even if I were in trouble, and I do not think that troubles ever come to kings' daughters.'

"Don't be too sure of that," the squirrel answered, "and remember my promise." And away he darted to the very top of the tree, and was out of sight in a moment.

'I cannot now remember how it was brought about, but of course the squirrel proved a true prophet, and all manner of misfortunes overtook the poor princess. Probably some cruel step-mother overwhelmed her with ill-usage; but at last she was shut up in a damp and dark dungeon, and sentenced under pain of death to produce a certain quantity of gold by a certain day. In the height of her distress she remembered the squirrel's promise, and entreated him to come and help her. Hardly had she done so, when she heard a scratching at the iron grating which served for a window, and looking up, beheld the squirrel, to whom she immediately told all her sorrows. When he understood what it was she wanted, he said, "Do not make yourself unhappy about that; I know a tree where golden nuts grow, and although it is a long, long way from here, I will set off, and never cease going backwards and forwards until we have got enough."

"Oh," said the princess, "that is impossible, for there must be gold enough to cover the whole floor of the chamber." But the squirrel was not to be daunted: with incredible speed he traversed incredible distances an incredible number of times (for the fruit of each journey was only a single nut,)

until he had covered the whole floor so thickly with the golden filberts, that not a speck of board was to be seen anywhere.'

I felt all the time I listened, that the tale was intended to induce me to let my poor squirrel go, but, like the little princess in the story, I could not resolve to part with it. When we came in from our walk, I ran to the garden, in the hope of seeing that it was grown suddenly reconciled to captivity; but no, there it was, tugging at its chain, and uttering little sharp cries of disappointment and rage when it found its efforts fruitless. I watched it in silence, and then walked sadly away, shaking my head, and saying, 'No, I cannot let it go.' I knew I was wrong, and very uncomfortable I was all the evening, and when I was in bed, I did nothing but think of the squirrel, and fancy I heard its little mournful cries, but still I went to sleep, refusing to make the sacrifice my conscience was extorting from me. In my dreams I was haunted by Charles's story, and waking long before it was time to get up, I renewed my internal struggle, and at last, sorely against my will, to please Charles, made up my mind that as soon as I was dressed I would run down to the garden, and let the squirrel go. I kept my resolution, but when I came to the tree, there was the collar and the chain, but the squirrel was gone. My good resolve came too late. The sacrifice I had made so grudgingly was of no use. It was evident that



some one had let it loose. I ran to Cousin Charles with the tears in my eyes, and asked if he had done it. No, and he was sorry it grieved me so much. 'It was not that,' I said, 'but I did wish to let it go myself.' No great inquiries were made at the time as to who the culprit might be, and it was not until years afterwards that Eleanor confessed she had done it. She had slipped out in the dusk of the evening, and at the expense of a severe bite, unfastened the collar.

Our intercourse with Cousin Charles, however, was not all sunshine; Eleanor would often take him away from me in the midst of a game at play, an interference which I always resented by tears. I am afraid we all, in our childish way, had a sense of rivalry, and that he sometimes found it difficult to settle our respective claims on his attention with perfect impartiality. I many a time thought with regret, afterwards, how often I must have teased and worried him into playing with me, when he would rather have been doing something else, and that Eleanor's interruptions, though very trying, were really very necessary, to prevent my most unfairly taxing his kindness. She had her own trials of a somewhat similar nature, as my father and mother constantly deranged our plans for the afternoon, by carrying Charles off with them, greatly to our disappointment, and, I should now think, to his relief. Indeed, Eleanor's chagrin at such accidents was sometimes too strong to be kept to herself.

I remember one day it had been settled in the morning that she and Cousin Charles should ride together in the afternoon, but about an hour afterwards, my father came into the dressing-room, and said he was sorry to disappoint her, but he must take Cousin Charles with him. I forget where he was going to. My mother, of course, said it did not matter, Eleanor should have her ride the next day. Poor Eleanor! she dared not look up or speak, but presently the large tears fell drop by drop upon her slate, effacing the Rule-of-Three sum she was busy in doing. My mother turned round and saw her distress, and I shall never forget how gently and kindly she chid her for her want of self-command and childishness. But poor Eleanor was not in a state to profit by the rebuke; and to be accused of childishness, just as she was aping the feelings and follies of a woman, provoked her beyond all measure.

She flung from the room with an impetuosity of manner so disrespectful, that my poor mother felt herself bound to notice it. She followed her to her chamber, and when she came back, she looked vexed and sad, but she said nothing to us; nor did Eleanor, though Agnes tried to comfort her, until she broke out with the words, 'If she tells Charles, Cousin Charles, I shall never be able to bear it; I shall run away, I know I shall.'

'Eleanor,' Agnes said, in a tone of horror, and Eleanor did look ashamed of herself—'will you

not come out walking with us? You had much better do so than sit here crying yourself ill.'

'No,' Eleanor replied, 'I would rather be alone—but stay, if you fall in with Marian Thresher, ask her to come on here and see me—she will understand and pity me.'

Marian Thresher was a near neighbour of ours, who lived at a very pretty picturesque farm-house with her grandfather, Captain Thresher, and two cross old aunts. She and Eleanor were particular friends, and they had all manner of secrets together, from which even Agnes was excluded. She and I were not very fond of Miss Marian, and used to say that she was deceitful and ill-natured; but Eleanor invariably defended her. Poor child, she had no one to play with at home, so she was always glad to come to us, and my mother, who never lost an opportunity of doing a kindness, was constantly inviting her to spend the day at the Rectory. We did meet her that afternoon, and gave Eleanor's message. She was pleased to be invited, and exclaimed, 'Is dear Nelly in distress? of course I will go to her. I dare say my aunts will scold me for staying out so long, but I shall not care for that.'

When we returned from our walk the two friends were pacing up and down under the garden wall in earnest consultation, and we heard Marian say, 'Trust me, I will manage for you.' What she meant to manage, I am sure I do not know;

but we discovered that Eleanor's punishment for her disrespect to my mother, was to be her losing her ride altogether; Agnes was to go instead. No wonder poor Eleanor was miserable, with my mother vexed and unhappy, and the fear that Cousin Charles would know all; but Agnes was always ready to console and make peace. 'I do not mean to ride, Eleanor,' she said, 'and I shall go at once to mamma, and ask her to forgive you, and let you go to-morrow.'

'No, no,' Eleanor replied, touched by the generosity of the proposal—'only ask her not to say anything to Cousin Charles.'

Agnes ran off, and Eleanor proudly added, 'I can bear being treated like a naughty child, but not that he should know it.'

'He will not think the worse of you,' Marian answered, 'because you were disappointed and unhappy at losing your ride with him. It was very, very hard upon you.'

'But, Marian,' I said, 'papa wanted Cousin Charles; he could not ride with Nelly this afternoon, and she would have ridden with him to-morrow if she had been good-humoured about it.'

Eleanor told me she would not submit to be found fault with by her younger sister, and Marian not to talk of what I did not understand. By-and-by Agnes came back, and 'Well, Agnes,' we all exclaimed, 'what does mamma say?'

'She says,' Agnes replied, 'that she never in-

tended saying anything to Cousin Charles about the matter, but that she cannot allow Eleanor to ride to-morrow, and she wishes to speak to her in her dressing-room.' Eleanor walked away slowly and silently, and a moment after Cousin Charles and my father rode into the yard: we soon saw the former walking up to the house, and ran to meet him.

'Where is Nelly?' he asked with his usual good-nature. 'I was so sorry to disappoint her of her ride, but we must make up for it to-morrow.'

There was a dead silence—no one answered, until Marian, looking earnestly and even beseechingly at Agnes and me, said at last, 'No, you will not ride with Eleanor to-morrow, she gives up her place to Agnes.'

'That is very kind of Nelly,' he replied. 'It is a long time, Agnes, since you and I have had a ride together; I do not think you get quite your fair share of Udolpho.'

Agnes did not know what to say in answer, but I was so vexed with Marian, that I exclaimed, 'It is not at all kind of Nelly, she does not give up her place to Agnes. Mamma has decided that she is to ride to-morrow, and I wish Nelly were here, and she would not let Marian tell such stories, for papa says she always speaks the exact truth.'

I do not think I spoke out of ill-nature, for I was very sorry for poor Eleanor, but my childish

sense of justice was hurt. Marian grew very red, and fixed her eyes on me with a look of the keenest reproof.

‘I would do anything to serve a friend,’ she said.

Cousin Charles shook his head. ‘No, no, Marian,’ he answered; ‘you must not let your good-nature lead you into a disregard of truth: no motive can excuse that, however good. And besides, I do not see that there was any occasion for giving Nelly a merit which did not belong to her.’

‘Yes, but there was,’ I said.

‘Indeed, well then, little May, I think in justice to Marian, you ought to tell me what.’

‘Oh, pray do not think about me,’ Marian replied proudly, ‘I am very willing to be sacrificed to dear Eleanor.’

Agnes and I were both silent, in truth we neither of us wished to excuse her by exposing Nelly.

‘What, have you all lost your tongues?’ he said with a good-humoured smile. ‘Well, I suppose I had better not ask any thing about it.’

‘Yes,’ Agnes said, gently, ‘that would be best.’ And so the matter ended.

## CHAPTER IV.

## THE GLORIOUS VOLUNTEERS.

'Yes, come, but hope not to return,  
Here other fate thou soon shalt learn,  
Shalt learn that Britain yet can claim  
The glories of the British name;  
Can fearless still maintain her stand  
On British as on Syrian land,  
Still rise superior to the sons of chance,  
And single-handed dare to cope with France.'

*Volunteer Song.*

I SUPPOSE there are none who have not heard of the arming of the people, which took place in consequence of Buonaparte's projected invasion of this country; but perhaps few who have *only* heard, can conceive the intense excitement of the period. In 1803 I was eight years old, and consequently could perfectly appreciate what was going on around me, and could share in the enthusiasm which agitated the rest of the world. Even now, after an interval of fifty years, I cannot recall those days without a thrill of emotion; nevertheless, I love to dwell on their martial fervour and spirit-stirring incidents. My readers must allow me to remind them, that for two years the preparations on the French coast to attack us went on, as it were, before our very eyes. The sight

awoke a hatred of the French more bitter than had any of the atrocities which they had so recently committed. And the hot indignation of the country at the intended insult, the passionate patriotism that glowed in the hearts of all classes, burst out in the arming of the people, and in a flight of volunteer songs and pamphlets, most of which have been long ago forgotten. In these fraternising days the hearty hatred with which every Frenchman was regarded would, no doubt, be considered extremely illiberal; but should the same circumstances ever recur, I trust the same spirit will not be wanting.

There was not a ploughman who did not glow with a spark of generous courage; not one who, according to that beautiful primary article of an Englishman's faith, did not feel within himself the strength to knock down at least three Frenchmen, who would not have spent his life freely in the defence of his own hearth. The songs of the period added not a little to the enthusiasm of the people; they were thundered out over the dinner-table amidst the rattling of glasses and thumping of fists, they were whistled beside the hay-cart and harvest-wagon, and Dibdin made our vessels echo to the same patriotic and heroic sentiments. Who shall say that that was not true poetry which stirred the hearts of all classes so deeply? There was one song of Dibdin's called 'True Courage,' which was for ever in our ears that



summer. Cousin Charles hummed it over his books, and sang it in his rambles and idle moments, till our hearts throbbed beneath its influence. Will Wild whistled it in the stable, and Edward was perpetually shouting it out at the top of his voice. Eleanor and Agnes sang it together in their own room, and I murmured it to my doll as I rocked her to sleep in my arms, or tried its narcotic qualities upon a mischievous restless kitten that I called my own. The air and the words are ringing now in my brain, and I *must* quote them :

'Why, what's that to you if my eye I'm a-wiping ?

A tear is a pleasure, d'ye see, in its way ;

'Tis nonsense for trifles, I own, to be piping,

But they as can't pity, why I pities they.

Says the Captain, says he, I shall never forget it,

If of courage you'd know, Lads, the true from the sham,

'Tis a furious lion in battle, so let it,

But duty appeased, 'tis in mercy a lamb.

There was bustling Bob Bounce, for danger not caring,

Helter skelter to work, pelt away, cut and drive,

Swearing he for his part had no notion of sparing,

And as for a foe, why he'd eat him alive.

But when that he found an old prisoner he'd wounded,

Who once saved his life as near drowning he swam ;

The lion was tamed, and with pity confounded,

He wept over him all as one as a lamb.'

I quote from memory, and I may therefore have transposed the verses, or altered a word or two, but I think that they are tolerably correct.

I believe it has never been an ascertained point whether Napoleon meant to invade us or not; but at the time no one doubted it, and little was talked or thought of but the coming storm.

Many a time have I sat and listened to the most animated discussions on the subject, until I almost fancied I heard the tramp of French soldiers marching up the lane. All who lived in the southern counties were particularly on the alert; and Mitchelmore being not more than sixty miles distant from the coast, soon felt the necessity of following the example of her neighbours, and arming herself. My father and mother were in such easy circumstances, that the Rectory was one of the most hospitable houses in the neighbourhood. Upon one occasion, I know not how, two dinner-parties had been merged into one of unusual size. The number of the guests made it a matter of more importance than ordinary, and there were some amongst them who were no great favourites of my dear mother, and whom she generally contrived to invite one at a time, when the sobriety of the rest of the party might shame them into equally good behaviour. Now, however, there were enough of these unruly spirits to keep each other in countenance; and I remember her saying to my father, that she feared he would have some trouble in maintaining peace and quietness; for in 1803, gentlemen still sat long over their wine, and though drinking deeply was going

out of fashion, it was not yet wholly abandoned. Party-spirit, too, ran high, so that between the port and the politics the host had sometimes a difficult game to play. We kept late hours at the Rectory, and it was near five before our guests arrived. I sat in a window-seat with Edward, and watched the ladies and gentlemen as they entered, and wondered at the noise of many tongues. Cousin Charles was at home, and I thought how handsome and charming he looked, as he stood leaning down on the arm of a sofa, talking to a very pretty young lady. Eleanor was standing shyly a little behind them, and presently I saw him take her hand with brotherly kindness and draw her forward, and then the young lady, who was a Miss Standish, made room for Eleanor to sit down beside her. Nelly looked shy but pleased; she liked so much being treated as if she were grown up. Miss Standish did not speak to her often, she looked a little shy herself, and had enough to do in answering Cousin Charles. I think now that she had no modern ease of manner, but there was a sweet gentle bashfulness about her, which made her soft beautiful blue eyes, and delicate fair face, very lovely. The colour brightened on her cheek when she glanced at him, and though she said little she seemed pleased, and doubtless was, that he should talk to her. I am sure he thought her very charming

and beautiful, for he seemed fascinated to stand there, and look at and speak to nobody else.

Presently dinner was announced, and the gentlemen moved and stood aside, whilst the ladies in solemn procession walked out of the room in a row, my father heading the file with the lady of highest rank, and my mother bringing up the rear; and in a very few seconds the rattling of plates proclaimed that the business of the dinner-table had commenced. We retired to have our own tea in my mother's dressing-room, and to learn our lessons for the next day; and by the time both were accomplished the ladies had returned to the drawing-room, and there we rejoined them. The conversation was not, I suppose, very animated; it never is when we are left to our own unassisted efforts; and I suspect, as usual, the gentlemen in the dining-room greatly out-talked the ladies. There the noise of many tongues gradually increased, until one would have imagined them to be all talking together. And before long the clamour, for really I can call it by no other name, grew so loud and earnest, that we all remained silent and listened. By-and-by there was a great thumping of the table, and rattling of glasses, and then a lull, and then a single voice rose calm and deliberate, and flowed on some time, only interrupted by sundry stamps of approval, and an occasional 'hear hear.' It was my father's; what he said we could not of

course distinguish, but he was succeeded by two or three of our guests, who, though beginning quietly enough, seemed to talk themselves into a fury as they went on. My poor mother's face flushed with anxiety, and some other of the ladies did not look much more cool or comfortable. Now and then a few sentences, spoken with peculiar emphasis, reached our ears, but they were rather calculated to increase curiosity than allay apprehension. 'Imminent danger,' 'throats cut,' 'without a moment's delay,' 'sword in hand,' 'knock them down,' 'die sooner,' and such like, being far from peaceable expressions. At last there came a pause; my mother stood up ready for action, as if she felt everything depended on the next sound; there was a murmur, a hum or two, and then a clear, strong, but uncultivated voice, commenced singing. The moment she caught the notes of a well-known air, with a sigh of relief she exclaimed, 'Oh, it is only the French,' and sat down as if all danger were over. The words of the song we could not then catch, but I often heard them afterwards; and as they are too redolent of the spirit of the times to be passed over, shall quote them, and I suppose to almost every one they will have the charm of novelty:—

'We're told that the French to invade us intend,  
And no wonder if Buonaparte's madness thus end,  
For that man is most likely, it must be allowed,  
In the air to build castles who lives at St. Cloud.

They'll come we are told, or Fame makes a *faux pas*,  
In balloons to be filled with the smoke of burnt straw,  
And it's quite a-propos that a plan, without joke,  
Which is founded in vapour should finish in smoke.

Then some say they'll come here in flat-bottomed boats,  
To reap a good harvest and sow their wild oats—  
But the harvest they fancy to reap will be smashed,  
And their oats and themselves get tremendously thrashed.

But how to get here the French needn't take pains  
To project this or that way, or puzzle their brains;  
Let them once put to sea, and they'll soon find *escorts*,  
For our sailors will pilot them into our ports.

As a proof that they'll come, the French every day toast,  
"The Frenchman who first sets his foot on our coast,"  
But he'll not keep his footing I wager a crown;  
So let us toast "The Briton that first knocks him down."

There was a thunder of applause and much laughter at the conclusion of the song, and then the ladies, relieved from the fears that their respective lords and masters were making fools of themselves, began somewhat eagerly to canvass the probability of the French really coming.

When the gentlemen joined us, the same topic was continued, and various plans for the defence of the country and the village, and for the safety of individual families, were discussed. All grew eagerly excited, and the ladies were urgent, though there was no need of urgency, for something, no matter what, being done immediately. Every now and then some horrible trait of the recent revolution was alluded to or related. My

blood ran cold as, for the first time since I could understand, I heard of atrocities which to this day I cannot read without burning tears of indignation and disgust. I shuddered as I sat in the window-seat, and fancied that the evening breeze amongst the trees was the rustling of the coming enemy. I suppose my face wore rather a panic-stricken expression, for Cousin Charles came up to me and said, 'Never mind, little May, they are not here yet;' then turning to Miss Standish, who was sitting near me, he endeavoured to convince her of the extreme improbability of their coming at all. But even as he spoke, it was evident he was reasoning against his own belief, and almost against his wishes; and when he talked of what he would do if they did come, not boastfully, but with a sparkling eye, and a gentle courtesy of demeanour only too charming, it was clear he thought the danger imminent. 'If it should ever be my fortune,' he said, 'my good fortune I had well-nigh called it, to meet them sword in hand, the thought of for what and for whom I am fighting, would give me double strength, and make me almost rejoice in the opportunity of striking a blow for my country, and,' with a little *gallant* bow and smile, 'for you.' He spoke with expression, and the little compliment was more than she knew how to answer; but perhaps the blush which mantled her cheek did as well as the most finished sentence.

In most cases much talk bodes no action, but in this the excitement was not to die away with the evening, and the result of our memorable dinner-party was the formation of the Mitchelmore and Mitchelden volunteers. What a spirit-stirring summer it was. We all in our different ways were wild about the invasion. I know I went to bed every night firmly convinced that the French really would come to-morrow. It was settled, that the moment we heard they were landed, my mother, Eleanor, Agnes, and I, were to be sent off in the wagon under the especial guardianship of Master Wild (not Will, but his father) into Staffordshire, where my father had a small farm, he himself remaining at Mitchelmore to look after the old men, women, and children, who would be left without any other defender. At Charles's earnest persuasion, Mrs. and Miss Standish were to go with us, an arrangement for which they were very grateful, both ladies being quite panic-stricken at the prospect of war so near home. Eleanor, who had a high spirit, talked of the ignominy of flight, and with glowing eye and cheek declared she would much rather remain and share any danger there was to be shared. To Agnes and me she indulged in many an heroic burst of indignation at being expected to desert my father and Charles, sometimes even protesting that when it came to the point, she should insist on remaining. She never, however, ventured to



say anything on the subject before my mother, whose own quiet acquiescence in the plan she felt to be a rebuke to her impetuosity. Edward and I had a way of our own of showing our interest; we invented a new game, at which we played incessantly, and with unwearied delight. It required nothing but a moderate-sized stick, and a very strong imagination. The sticks we called our swords, and arming ourselves with them every day when we went out, we used them to beat the bushes, and cut off the heads of the nettles, exclaiming, 'And this is the way we beat the French, we beat the French, we beat the French!' The whole game consisted in suiting the word to the action.

Sometimes we set off full tilt down the wood-walk, calling out, and 'this is the way we hunt the French, we hunt the French, we hunt the French;' sometimes we stood still and had a fight, or we converted our sticks into guns, loading, presenting, and firing, always keeping the burden in accordance with the deed. We found it a most exciting pastime, and played with such animation, that one day, to our great delight, Cousin Charles joined us, and taught us ever so many new ways of destroying and tormenting Frenchmen. Children have great powers of make believe, and we made believe with such success, that I used often to grow quite frightened, only I was too much ashamed of being such a coward to say so. I am

wandering away, however, from the more dignified proceedings of the Mitchelmore volunteers. In a very short time from the day of our dinner-party, the men were enrolled, and the officers appointed. Arms and regimentals arrived, and the whole place was alive with military preparations. The uniforms were scarlet, with green cuff and collar, and a flower-pot hat with a stiff black feather, about eight inches high.

The Sunday before their first meeting was to take place my father preached a sermon on the coming struggle. He took as his text the third verse of the twenty-seventh Psalm: 'Though an host of men were laid against me, yet shall not my heart be afraid: and though there rose up war against me, yet will I put my trust in Him.' And never was preacher listened to with more intense attention. Each ruddy sun-burnt face was turned towards him, every eye was fixed on his. Old men almost bent double, clasped their nerveless hands above their sticks, and rested their heads on them, that they might better mark his words. Yet there was nothing passionate or declamatory in his manner; no, he stood as he always stood in the pulpit, his hands clasped before him, holding the whole congregation in his calm penetrating eyes, and in slow measured accents speaking to the hearts of his people. He did not seek to kindle in them a fanatical enthusiasm; he did not utter bitter words of the enemy,

but whilst explaining to them the danger, he spoke of faith in God; and whilst advising them to arm themselves, he warned them of the immediate temptations which would beset them, not from the French, for God might mercifully yet avert the threatened invasion, but from evil companionship, unsettled ways, idleness, and drunkenness. For there was a worthless idle set in Mitchelmore as in every other parish, and the whole crew had joined the volunteers, and men were so scarce, from the smallness of the village, that the officers were glad enough to enroll them. So that my father's warning was not uncalled for.

'I wish they would always listen as they listened to-day,' he said to my mother; 'my sermon was long, and yet I do not think an eye moved. They are, to be sure, generally attentive; but to-day their hearts were in the matter, and I felt that they drank in the words as I uttered them.'

The meadow in front of our house was used as the drill-ground. It was unusually large, and by taking down some panels of quaint Chinese railing, another almost equally extensive could be added to it, so that there was quite space enough for the manœuvring. The wood-walk which skirted two sides of it, and two or three pretty groups of trees, gave it a somewhat park-like appearance; and on drill days, when full of red coats, the effect was very picturesque. The turnpike road ran at the bottom, and not unfrequently one of the many

coaches which passed our gates would slacken its speed, whilst the outside passengers stood up to get a better view of our proceedings, and sometimes expressed their sympathy by a hearty cheer. Every man, and almost every boy in the parish had enlisted, even to the household servants; and it was very amusing to see how the red coats altered their appearance; most of them were extremely proud of their uniform, and James Clarke, who was then our footman, generally contrived to come in from drill so late, that he had not time to put on his livery, and to our great delight waited at table in scarlet. I suspect such accidents gave us quite as much pleasure as they did him. At last the men were supposed to have made such progress in their military studies as to be fit for inspection, and accordingly a colonel, whose name I have forgotten, was to come and review them. We were in hopes that the review would have taken place in our meadows, but we were disappointed; the spot chosen was a small common about two miles from Mitchelmore, and I greatly feared that being so far off, I should be left behind. I did not very well know what a review was, and hearing a good deal said about the enemy, quite believed the French really would be there at last. By this time I had grown tired of waiting for them, and sometimes agreed with Edward, that 'I wished they would come, and not be so long about it,' so that my desire to go

with the rest of the party was very intense. It was not, however, until the very morning that my mother made me happy by the promise of taking me, and then, after a few minutes of exuberant delight, there came a strange kind of flutter at my heart, and I almost thought I should have liked to have been left behind. I would not have owned it for the world, but I was really frightened. My father, Charles, Edward, and Eleanor, rode; my mother drove Agnes in the donkey-carriage, and I was placed on a little footstool between them.

'May looks rather grave about it,' my father said.

'Ah,' said Cousin Charles, with a wicked laugh, 'well enough she may, the French will make nothing of eating up such a morsel as she is. They are all ogres, May, and particularly fond of little girls.'

I had no time to answer, for he just cracked his whip, and Jack, the donkey, who was young and frolicksome in those days, set off with us full gallop down the lane, and the horses with their riders came trotting after. Charles was in high spirits, and often rode up to us, offering my mother to race with her, and somehow or another keeping Jack in a canter all the way. Indeed, whenever any of the horses approached him, Jack immediately quickened his pace, and having once taken the lead, seemed determined to keep it. As

fast as his little stumpy legs could go he galloped along, giving us a most unmerciful shaking, the carriage having no springs, and the road being very rough; but he and Cousin Charles had their own way, and we all arrived on the field of action together. I had been sitting crouched up at the bottom of the carriage, brooding over Charles's last words to me, and getting every minute more and more frightened; all the courage I had displayed in knocking off the heads of imaginary Frenchmen had evaporated; I blushed for my cowardice, I felt I was a disgrace to my country; but when we stopped on the common, tears of terror were running over my cheeks; great was everyone's surprise when my distress was perceived; my mother took me up on her knees and inquired tenderly into its cause, but for a long time I was really too much ashamed of myself to confess the truth. At last, however, she partly guessed, and partly heard words, that would have been unintelligible to any other ears, and exclaimed, 'My dear child, you do not think the French are here, do you?'

I looked up at Cousin Charles, who, trying not to smile, said kindly, 'It was very wrong in me to frighten you so, little May—there are no Frenchmen here really; we are only going to make believe, as you and Edward do when you play with your sticks—the French are all safe the other side of the water.'

I was comforted, but I did not get over my panic the whole day; when not observed, I often looked timidly round, to be sure that all was right, and I did not like standing near any of the little thickets that were dotted over the common, for I felt as if a Frenchman might have jumped out of them at any moment. However, the gaiety and animation of the scene diverted my attention, and often made me forget my fears. Besides our own infantry corps, a detachment from a cavalry regiment that had been raised in another neighbourhood, had come over to keep the ground, and amused themselves, to the admiration of all beholders, in galloping round and round the little common, thereby creating a good deal of terror in the village children, and some slight confusion amongst the more aristocratic spectators. Of course the manœuvres were quite beyond my comprehension, and I do not think I ever took in the fact that there was really no enemy at all. I believe the men acquitted themselves very creditably, and, at all events, were greatly complimented by the officer who reviewed them, and who pronounced them, in a most authoritative voice, 'to be fit for immediate service.' One or two little incidents made more impression upon me than the military part of the spectacle; one was, that this said Colonel Somebody, who was the only real soldier in the field, and certainly looked very different from our raw recruits, rode up to my

mother on his handsome black horse, and dismounting, stood talking to her for some minutes. I remember standing by her, staring at him with wide open eyes, perfectly dazzled by the gold lace on his coat, and making up my mind that the Black Prince, with whom I had recently made acquaintance, must have been just like him, an idea probably suggested to me by the colour of his horse. The other incident was even smaller, and I know not why it has fixed itself in my memory. It was only a glance, a look, between Cousin Charles and Miss Standish, but something in its expression revealed to me that he was the cynosure of other eyes than ours, and that we were not quite all the world to him.

When the review was over, men and officers sat down to a great dinner, spread in a barn borrowed for the occasion from a farm on the outskirts of the common; and the ladies having refreshed themselves with tea and bread and butter at the house, crowded round the great open doors of the temporary dining-room, to hear the songs and speeches with which the day concluded.

I wish I could remember the words of both as vividly as I do the noise and excitement; but only a scattered verse or two has escaped oblivion—and I suspect I remember *them* more from having heard them afterwards, than from having heard them at the time. I recollect one of the gentlemen cavaliers singing a song which was



more applauded than any of the rest, and which commenced with the words :—

‘I’ve a dear little wife,  
Who I love as my life,  
To lose her I should not much like, Sir;  
And t’would make me run wild  
To see my sweet child  
With its head on the top of a pike, Sir.’

At last, when songs and toasts seemed pretty well exhausted, and confusion to the French had been drunk in every possible form, the toast of the day was proposed: ‘The monarch we love, and the freedom we boast.’ I never shall forget the burst of enthusiastic patriotism which followed. Instantly all started from their seats, and standing on one foot, and placing the other on the bench from which they had risen, they raised their full glasses above their heads, whilst with heart and soul they shouted rather than sang the national anthem. Oh, for them how full of meaning were its quaint old words! What though there was little music in most of the voices, in tune or out of tune, one common sentiment harmonized and exalted the whole, and when the spirit speaks, no ear can presume to criticise, young and old, gentle and simple, even the ladies outside the door sung from the abundance of a full heart, and the music had, therefore, a power which no science could have given it. The last note had

scarcely died away, ere it was succeeded by such a burst of cheers as was absolutely deafening; again, again, until the canonical 'three times three' were fulfilled, they rose louder and louder, every cheer accompanied by that carefully executed wave of the glass, which is their graceful and appropriate accompaniment. To us the scene was as new as it was interesting; but I think the most striking part of it to me, was to see my own father apparently cheering as loudly as any of his neighbours. There was something in the excitement of his attitude wholly at variance with the calm repose of his features. Child as I was, the inconsistency of one so temperate and cool taking part in so impassioned a scene, struck me, and made me feel that there was almost an incongruity in his adding to the noise and uproar around us. Perhaps the indignant murmurs, the angry hum that came from the shores of Britain, the state of excitement evident in the whole hive, really did check Napoleon's earnest desire to overturn it. It was clear that the golden 'Bees of France' would not be suffered to taste the honey of England without having first to abide the stings of its defenders; and those who took part in the volunteering always flattered themselves that the emperor was frightened out of the scheme by the noise of the indignant swarms.

The people maintained their warlike attitude during some months, but gradually the alarm of

invasion died away. As far as we were concerned, the expectation came to a climax a few weeks after the review; Charles had returned to his studies at Oxford, and much of our excitement had subsided; Edward and I were almost tired of beating the French down the lane and round the walk and meadows; when one day the cry came up from the coast that the enemy had landed. The Portsmouth coach brought the news, and left it at a little public-house where it was in the habit of stopping to water its horses, which stood about a mile from Mitchelmore, and in half-an-hour after the whole village was in a state of commotion. Edward heard the report first, and rushed abruptly into his father's study, shouting out, 'The French, Papa, the French are landed, Will Wild says so!' He was in such a hurry to tell the news, the words were hardly intelligible, and his cheeks were so red and flushed, and his eyes so bright, that evidently the feeling which thrilled that little manly heart nearly found vent in tears.

'Landed!' said my father, smiling, 'are you sure that they are not marching up the lane at this minute?'

But a very few questions convinced him that the report was not an invention of Edward's and Will Wild's, and he put on his hat, and went at once to the public-house to ascertain the truth of the rumour. During his absence, Captain Thresher came up, and one or two others, to learn his

opinion, and consult with him what was to be done. 'Is it true?' was the general exclamation, as soon as he reappeared.

'True that the coachman said so,' he answered, 'but he gave no particulars of any kind. They never could have landed without a struggle, and with this south-westerly wind, we must have heard the guns had there been any fighting. Has any one heard them?'

No one could say they had; and to the next question, 'What was to be done?' my father decreed, 'Nothing. Let us wait,' he said, 'until the next Portsmouth coach has passed.'

'Wait!' farmer Atkins impatiently exclaimed, striking his stick on the ground, 'wait! we may wait until the French are in Mitchelmore. Do you think, Sir, they will let the coaches run as usual? No, no; what I say is, let us ring the church bells, and summon the labourers home and march out to meet them.'

But Captain Thresher agreeing with my father, it was decided the captain should go down to the public-house and wait the arrival of the next coach. If no coach made its appearance, as farmer Atkins predicted, it would be clear that something was amiss, and there would be then quite time enough to call the volunteer force together, and march them as far as Wellsbury to join the military. My mother, who was extremely alarmed, wished, I believe, to set off on the instant into

Staffordshire, in spite of my father's assuring her that it was impossible that the French should have passed our fleet and effected a landing. She waited, however, Captain Thresher's return, though with an anxiety which kept her at the window watching for his reappearance. Hot and angry he and his grey pony came at last, and his first words were, 'It is all a lie, Ma'am, all a lie from beginning to end—saw some boats out at sea early this morning, and took them for the French fleet.'

'You spoke to the coachman yourself?' my mother said. 'You are quite sure it is not true?'

'True, Ma'am,' said Captain Thresher, testily, as if the disappointment were more than his temper could bear, 'why he says it is not possible. it should be true.'

'Well, thank God we are spared,' she answered, animated by a very different spirit from his, and giving a sigh of relief. But I think we young folk were haunted all the evening by a lurking doubt, as to whether or no the French were in Portsmouth; and, at all events, after the excitement of the last few hours, we felt it very dull to settle quietly down again into the conviction that nothing had happened, and that nothing was going to happen. No new rumours, however, came to disturb our tranquillity; and before Christmas everyone, even those who had clung most obstinately to the belief, I had well nigh

written hope, had abandoned the expectation. I suspect Captain Thresher's feeling of disappointment was not peculiar to himself. When the nerves are braced up to meet and endure some calamity, the first feeling of the human heart on being spared it, is not always either joy or gratitude, but a feeling perhaps as near akin to regret as to any more agreeable sensation.

And here my chapter was to have ended, but since writing it, I have found in an old blotting-book which I had not seen or opened for years, a manuscript copy of two or three of the before-mentioned Volunteer Songs, and I must, therefore, add them to it, feeling sure that they will prove interesting to many, some amongst whom may be able to bear witness to their authenticity.

‘THE PLOUGHMAN’S DITTY.’

*Being an answer to that foolish question, ‘What have the poor to lose by the French invasion?’*

TO THE TUNE OF ‘HE THAT HAS THE BEST WIFE.’

‘Because I’m but poor,  
And slender my store,  
That I’ve nothing to lose is the cry, Sir;  
Let who will declare it,  
I vow I can’t bear it,  
I give all such traitors the lie, Sir.

## 'LONG, LONG AGO.'

'Though my house is but small,  
Yet to have none at all  
Would sure be a greater distress, Sir ;  
Should my garden so neat,  
With its flowers so sweet,  
Prove a prize to a foreign oppressor.

'I've a dear little wife,  
Whom I love as my life,  
To lose her I should not much like, Sir ;  
And t'would make me run wild  
To see my sweet child  
With its head on the point of a pike, Sir.

'I've my church, too, to save,  
And will go to my grave  
In defence of a church that's the best, Sir ;  
I've my king, too, God bless him,  
Let no man oppress him,  
For none has he ever oppress, Sir.

'My cot is my throne,  
What I have is my own,  
And what is my own I will keep, Sir ;  
Should 'Boney' come now,  
'Tis true I may plough,  
But I doubt if I ever should reap, Sir.

'Now do but reflect  
What I have to protect,  
Then ask if to fight I should choose, Sir ;  
King, church, child, and wife,  
Land, liberty, life,  
Now tell me I've nothing to lose, Sir.

Then I'd beat my ploughshare  
To a sword or a spear,  
And rush on those desperate men, Sir ;  
Like a lion I'd fight,  
That my sword, now so bright,  
May soon turn to a ploughshare again, Sir.'

## WAR SONG.

' Bow, Britons, bow, the haughty head,  
Bend, Britons, bend, the stubborn knee,  
Own your ancient virtue dead,  
And know not that ye once were free.  
Think not as your fathers thought,  
Speak no more as Britons ought,  
Act no more the Briton's part,  
With valiant hand and honest heart,  
What indignation bids you feel  
Dare not, dare not to reveal ;  
Though justice sharpen, dare not grasp the lance,  
Nor single-handed tempt the might of France.

' Holland and Italy obey,  
Their breasts with many a war-wound gored ;  
And crushed beneath my iron sway  
E'en Helvetia owns her lord.  
Boast not, then, your fleets that sweep  
The eastern and the western deep ;  
Boast not, then, your sea-washed land,  
Rampart-girt by Nature's hand ;  
Fleets and billows stay not me,  
Then bow the head and bend the knee.  
Britons, no more your rival ranks advance,  
Nor, single-handed, dare to cope with France.'



'Yes! as our Albion's root-bound oak  
Stoops to the tempest, we will bow.  
Yes! we will bend as the tall rock,  
Mocking the wave that chafes below.  
Now, by the Sable Prince imbrued  
Once and again in Gallic blood,  
By the laurels that entwine,  
Harry, thy brow, and, Marlborough, thine,  
By our chiefs on Nilus' tide,  
Him who triumph'd, him who died,  
By him whom Acre's turrets raise,  
To lion-hearted Richard's praise,  
Yes, we will still our rival ranks advance,  
And, single-handed, brave the might of France.

'Come, then, come, thou consul-king,  
Launch thy navies, arm thine host,  
And, beneath night's fav'ring wing,  
Thy banners plant on England's coast.  
Come, but hope not to return;  
Here other thoughts thou soon shalt learn,  
Shalt feel that Britons still may claim  
The honours of the British name;  
Can fearless still maintain their stand  
On British as on Syrian land,  
Still rise superior to the sons of chance,  
Still, single-handed, crush the pride of France.'

## CHAPTER V.

## OUR ACTING.

I OFTEN read wonderful accounts of the acting of young people, in modern story books. And I have seen some specimens of precocious cleverness amongst my own little friends, but what I have seen falls very far short of what I have read described. My own actual experience of the acting of children is so different from anything that I have ever seen written, that I am tempted to begin this chapter by relating the history of our first theatrical efforts. Charades were not yet come into fashion, nor were there any plays adapted to the comprehension and powers of childhood, at least we had none. It was Christmas, the Christmas following that memorable volunteer summer. Dear Charles was at home again, and we were all so happy to have him back, but I cannot say that his theatricals made us more so. Just after his arrival from Oxford, we had letters from India, telling us that my uncle and aunt were about to return to England by the middle of June or beginning of July; and though of course the return of an uncle and aunt, whom we had never known, was not much to us children, yet the lively pleasure the prospect gave Charles and my father and mother, spread a greater degree of cheer-

fulness through the house. Besides which, we had the gratification of reading William's name amongst the officers who had distinguished themselves at the battle of——. Indeed, he had a paragraph in the papers all to himself, in which the courage and coolness he had shown in executing some daring exploit was highly praised. My father read the account aloud to us in a quicker and more animated tone than usual. Charles hung on his words, and we all felt our hearts burn within us as we listened, fancying that no one else had ever done anything so gallant before, and that all the world must be ringing with his praises! After all, are there any deeds that stir our spirits so deeply as deeds of daring? Beside the fame that is won at the risk of life in the battle-field, all other fame seems poor and cold. We admire the great statesman, the man of science, the successful writer, but we do not feel exalted by their intellect; we do not feel that human nature is ennobled by them. It is those who triumph over death and danger, those who, at whatever cost of internal struggle, show in extremest peril a calm and dauntless front, who unappalled can ride up to the cannon's mouth at the call of duty; it is for such as these that we reserve the best homage of our hearts, the fervent worship which wrings tears of passionate admiration from our eyes, because we feel that all humanity is made glorious by such god-like scorn of death, that it is the triumph of the

immortal spirit over the base and mean fears of the flesh. I felt this in my childish degree as a child, with a clearer apprehension I have felt it in these latter days. One question I cannot but ask myself as I read of deeds which scarcely were ever equalled before. If this be warfare against a mortal foe, thus fearful and sanguinary, what must that warfare be, could we but rightly appreciate it, which we are set to wage against the powers of hell? But again I am wandering. It is of Charles that I would write, and not of such themes as battle-fields and carnage. The approach of his father's and mother's return, and his brother's praises, made him more lively and light-hearted than usual. I remember that there was less reading, and that he was more eager and willing to take active amusement. He hunted, and I recollect perfectly how anxious he was to go to a ball with the Standishes, and how amusingly he talked about it afterwards to my mother. It was a day or two after this, by-the-bye, that he first started the idea of acting something, and soon obtained her consent to our trying. We, of course were delighted, especially Eleanor and Agnes; as for me, I was voted at first to be too young to take a part; but Edward, sorely against the grain, was pressed into the service. Our play was Sheridan's Rivals, or rather some scenes from it: for not even Charles's willingness to be Sir Anthony, and his son, Faulkland, and Bob Acres, all by turns, could

make it possible to do more. My mother was as much interested in all the arrangements as we were, and many a merry discussion we had together in her dressing-room. My father was supposed to know nothing about it, and by way of preserving the secret, we always spoke to each other about it in a whisper. But, oh! even then, young as we were, it was not all sunshine. The serpent was already lurking amongst the flowers, infecting their sweet breath with his poison. Eleanor had made up her mind to be the heroine of the piece, Lydia Languish, and great was her disappointment when it came out that Charles wished to persuade Miss Standish to take the part. He had some difficulty in inducing my mother to let him ask her; all his assurances of her looking the character exactly, failing to make the idea quite agreeable; but there was a winning sweetness about him it was impossible to resist, and with a few words of caution, which I did not quite understand, but which called up a deeper red to his handsome face, she said at last that if Mrs. Standish did not object, she would not. Eleanor was most indignant, and dared even to show Charles her displeasure; not that she ventured to say she wished to be Lydia herself, but suddenly she announced her intention of not acting at all, and that with a degree of asperity which struck him so much, that he turned to her, and exclaimed, 'Why what is the matter, Nelly? what has gone wrong

with you? Come, tell me, and let me see if I cannot set it right.' And he took her hand so kindly in his.

'There is nothing the matter,' she said, 'only I do not choose to act. You can do without me, I dare say; cannot Miss Standish be Julia and Lydia, both?'

'My dear Nelly, it is impossible,' he replied. 'You will quite spoil our pleasure by not acting. Julia, we must leave out of the piece altogether, as well as Faulkland, but we want you as Mrs. Malaprop.'

But to have it settled by him that she was to be neither heroine, and to have Mrs. Malaprop assigned to her, put the finishing touch to her vexation, and hastily and angrily she declared that she could not and would not take the part. 'Nothing shall induce me,' she exclaimed, 'to make myself so absurd; a ridiculous fat old woman! Oh, Charles! how can you think of such a thing?'

'Why, she is so decidedly the best character in the play,' he answered, 'her endless blunders are so irresistible, that I expected you quite to prefer her to anyone else. Surely, you must be speaking "laconically" in declining the part. Let me read you some of her speeches; their delightful fun will make you change your mind.' And taking up the book, he read a scene or two aloud with great spirit and humour.

But Eleanor was not to be won over. 'If you

think it the best part,' she said, 'why do you not offer it to Miss Standish?'

He hesitated a moment, and then, without raising his head from his writing (for he was copying out the different parts from the book) answered, 'No, she could not be Mrs. Malaprop. Her soft blue eyes and delicate face are just fit for Lydia. You look too rosy and too full of health to represent so sentimental a young lady.'

'Oh! I am sure I do not want to be Lydia,' Eleanor answered, 'her affectation and folly may suit Miss Standish, but they don't recommend her to me, only I will not be Mrs. Malaprop. It is too ridiculous to make me her aunt.'

'Well, then, be Lucy,' he said, 'and let Agnes be Mrs. Malaprop.'

'Lucy?' she indignantly replied, 'what, Miss Standish's maid! no, indeed!'

'My dear Nelly, what possesses you this afternoon?' he asked, and he put his arm round her and drew her close to his side. 'But you will be good-natured, I am sure. It is not like you to refuse to do as you are asked.' He tried to look into her eyes as he spoke, but those eyes were full of tears, and she kept her head resolutely turned away. She longed to yield, but her proud heart still resisted, and impatiently disengaging herself from his arm, without once glancing at him, she walked out of the room, only saying in a cold positive tone, 'It is of no use to try and persuade me, I shall not act.'

Nevertheless, Agnes declared to Charles that she should try, and felt certain that Eleanor would come round.

‘She will never really persist in refusing,’ she said; ‘something has vexed her just now, I am sure, I cannot think what, but you will see it will soon be forgotten, and she will be quite willing to be Mrs. Malaprop to-morrow.’

‘I hope so,’ Charles said. ‘It will spoil everything to have her standing out and taking no part; and, besides, I do not quite see how we are to do without her.’

‘Could you not change the parts?’ Agnes timidly suggested. ‘I think Eleanor would be Lydia Languish, in spite of what she said.’

He looked vexed, and sighed, and it was a moment or two before he answered, and then he said, ‘Well, if nothing else will satisfy her, I suppose she must be Lydia; but, Agnes, try and persuade her to be Mrs. Malaprop. I trust to you to arrange it, only I am very anxious the parts should remain as they are.’

‘I will do my best,’ Agnes said, ‘but anything is better than quarrelling about such a trifle.’

‘Certainly,’ he answered, with some reluctance in his tone. ‘If it will make Nelly happy, let her be Lydia.’ But he looked more vexed than I had ever seen him before.

Agnes did her best to reconcile Eleanor to being Mrs. Malaprop, and when she found that was hopeless, made her the offer of being Lydia.



'Oh, no!' Eleanor answered in a greatly mollified tone. 'I cannot think of that, if Charles really wished it indeed.'

'Which he is very far from doing,' Agnes replied. 'You know he wishes Miss Standish to be Lydia. If you want to oblige and please him, you will be Mrs. Malaprop.'

'I do not see,' Eleanor said, 'why I am to have so strong a desire to oblige and please him, as it is quite clear that he has no wish to oblige and please me.'

'Oh, Nelly, how can you say so?' I exclaimed, 'when he offered to give up his own way, and let you be Lydia, and you cannot think how sorry he seemed to do it.'

'I am sure I will not vex him, then, by taking the part,' Eleanor replied, with her eyes full of tears. 'But I shall not be Mrs. Malaprop. You can act very well without me.'

'Only it will spoil our pleasure,' Agnes gravely answered, 'to leave you out. Charles said so.'

'He will not think about me,' Eleanor replied, 'and no one need. I don't in the least mind not acting, indeed,' speaking more proudly, 'I prefer it to being Mrs. Malaprop.'

'Oh, Eleanor! how can you make such a piece of work? and Charles, too, to refuse to oblige him?'

'It is you, Agnes, who make the piece of work, by not letting me go my own way in peace and quietness; and as for Charles, he does not care

about my being Mrs. Malaprop, I assure you. Let us say no more about it.'

In spite of her assertion, however, that she did not mind, she cried herself to sleep that night from vexation; and encouraged by her tears, Agnes made another attempt to induce her to change her mind the next morning whilst we were dressing.

She said everything she could think of to persuade her, even begging and praying her to comply. 'I know you will be sorry for it,' she said, 'when it is too late, when you see that you have vexed Charles, and spoilt our pleasure, and made yourself miserable, and all for some foolish fancy not worth considering. You are sorry now in your heart, only you will not say so; come, let us consider it as settled that you are to be Mrs. Malaprop.'

But Eleanor still held out, she could not and would not yield, and her evil genius, Marian, upheld her in her unkind determination. She went moping about by herself, keeping out of Cousin Charles's way as much as she could, and when forced to sit in the same room with him, avoiding either looking at or speaking to him as far as it was possible. Several times we saw him try to win her round by little affectionate words and deeds, but she resisted all. Her ill-humour did indeed make her miserable at the time, and ere a few weeks had past, the recollection of it stung her to the very heart, and she wept the bitter

tears of unavailing repentance. What would she have afterwards given to have been able to recall but one of the least of those loving glances she was so slighting then!

Eleanor's resistance did not put an end to our acting. It was proposed to give it up in consequence, but my mother, after speaking to her, decided it should still go on. She perhaps did not wish to make Nelly's ill-humour of so much consequence. Miss Standish accepted the part of Lydia Languish, Agnes was Mrs. Malaprop, Edward was Fag, Charles was Thomas the Coachman and Captain Absolute, and a brother of Miss Standish's was Sir Anthony. We had to rehearse again and again, Miss Standish riding over with her brother for that purpose two or three times, and playing the part of Lydia in her habit and hat. Eleanor never would stay in the room when she was present, and looked more gloomy than ever. Agnes and I found it hard work to learn our own parts, and harder work still to induce Edward to learn his. My mother, whose patience was inexhaustible, was present at every rehearsal, and Charles and Miss Standish seemed to think they could not have too many of them. They always ended by his escorting her and her brother some little way home, and returning full of animation and happiness. I think I never knew him so lively as he is that Christmas, and everyone remarked how all he was looking, so manly and handsome.

But poor Nelly's depression of spirits often made Agnes and me very sad behind the scenes.

The last day of Charles's vacation was fixed for our theatricals. Our audience was limited to Mr. and Mrs. Standish and the Threshers. No other attempt was made at a stage than moving away the chairs, and pushing aside the table; and no one thought of arranging the lights, but left them to follow, as they naturally would, the course of the latter, so that our end of the room was rather darker than the end occupied by the spectators. Our dresses were equally unpretending. Edward had a red waistcoat, contrived out of a pocket-handkerchief of my father's, which we were on no account to cut, and a piece of white tape tied round his hat. I figured in a print frock of my own, with a white apron and cap borrowed from one of the maids. And Agnes with a bolster fastened round her, to make her resemble Mrs. Malaprop in girth, if in nothing else, wore a gown of my mother's, and carried a large green fan in her hand. I thought Miss Standish looked lovely with a gauze scarf floating about her, and a little old-fashioned white hat, with a low crown and broad curly brim, which made her appear something like a China shepherdess. I stood behind the door, and watched Edward and Charles through the first scene. Edward, standing before the latter with his hands clasped behind him, precisely in the same attitude in which he always stood when

saying his lessons to my father, boggling over his part, which he only half knew, and too intent on catching Nelly's very audible promptings to think of accompanying the words with any appropriate action. My heart began to beat violently as I listened, and by the time it was my turn to appear, I was feeling perfectly scared. The exit of Charles and Edward ought to have been the signal for Lydia Languish and Lucy to come forward, but Miss Standish was all in a flutter, and hung back, and it required a little persuasion on Charles's part ere she could fancy herself ready. He took her hand, and led her to the door. 'I am sure I shall laugh,' she said, and I felt, 'I am sure I shall cry.' In a moment she stood before the audience, and giving me an encouraging little pat on the head, Charles pushed me in after her with my bundle of books in my hand, and ran off to put on his volunteer uniform, in which he was to appear as Captain Absolute. The first thing that happened was, that I let fall all my books, which were more in number than my small arms could very well contain, which accident deprived me of the little courage I had left. An awful pause ensued, and at last Miss Standish, who had sat herself down with her back to the company, spoke, but so low it was difficult to hear her; and I, after struggling through my first speech with quivering lips and faltering voice, fairly broke down in the second, and bursting into tears, ran

out of the room. Charles, hearing the sound of my grief, came from my father's study, where he was dressing, without his coat on, and sitting down with me, where no one could see us on the staircase, endeavoured to comfort and embolden me.

‘Why you repeated your first speech so nicely, May,’ he said, wiping away my tears with his handkerchief, ‘that I never thought of your heart failing you. Come, leave off crying, there’s a dear child, and let us go back to poor Miss Standish.’

But the idea of going back was horrible to me, and I clung to him, and said, ‘Oh, no, no!’ but he was so kind, so tender and affectionate, that I could not long refuse; and after a few minutes, I re-appeared on the stage, and got through my part with only an occasional sob or two, encouraged by being able to see him standing just outside the door watching my progress, and smiling whenever I looked round at him. Miss Standish repeated her part like a school-girl, never once looking at the audience, and only shyly and furtively at Charles, and yet I suppose she acted well, for he said it was charming. Agnes did Mrs. Malaprop bravely, without laughing at her absurd blunders, and now and then venturing on a little action. She really showed that she had some theatrical capacity, but the only scenes which made any approach to good acting, were

those between Sir Anthony Absolute and his son. Mr. Henry Standish put such spirit and fun into his part, that the audience laughed heartily, and Charles looked, moved, and spoke, most completely like the handsome young hero.

It was over at last; Charles, still in his regimentals, was complimenting Miss Standish on her performance. Eleanor was standing near him, looking the picture of despair. They were all three in the hall; and presently I saw her rest her elbows on the table, and cover her face with her hands. Miss Standish, without observing her, soon turned away into the drawing-room, and Charles was following her, when she laid her hand gently on his arm. He turned instantly, and looking into her sorrowful face, stopped her half-uttered words by drawing her towards him, and saying kindly, 'I see, I quite understand, we are friends again now.' He kissed her cheek, and the tears, which had been long dimming her eyes, flowed fast, but though she would have given the world to have spoken, she had no voice.

'I am afraid you think I have been unkind,' he said, 'and not thought about you, but indeed, dear Nelly, I did not mean to vex you, and do not know how I did it, and I assure you it has made me quite unhappy to see you standing by and doing nothing. Don't cry about it, dear, pray don't. Do you know I really cannot bear it?' and giving her another kiss, he added, 'There,

my aunt is playing a country dance, come, let us go in and dance it together.'

The music ceased as they walked towards the drawing-room, and my mother coming out, met them at the door. 'Do you like to dance?' she said.

'Very much,' he answered, 'I was this instant coming with Nelly.'

She look pleased, but replied, 'I am afraid that will not do, you must dance with Miss Standish; Eleanor, my dear, I am sorry to disappoint you, but I must ask you to give him up.'

Eleanor withdrew her hand more cheerfully than I had expected; and Charles, as he suffered her to do so, said, with a smile, 'I suppose I must be a good boy, and do as I am bidden, but, Nelly, remember you are engaged to me for the next time.'

I wondered whether he was really sorry to dance with Miss Standish; I am sure they seemed very happy together, and she looked so pretty, and young, and gentle.

When I went into the drawing-room, I was quite astonished at seeing my father standing up to dance with Mrs. Standish. I had never seen him dance before, and thought nothing could be more grand and dignified than his manner of moving; he handed her down the middle of the country dance with a stately courtesy that not even the rapid measure of the music could discompose; and when he bowed to her, he did not bestow a



nod or a shrug merely, but bent with a solemn grace, as if he himself were impressed with the importance of what he was doing. Ah, ladies do not get such bows now-a-days, such deferential worship is out of fashion, but when it was the mode, it must have been as becoming to the gentlemen themselves, as doubtless it was fascinating to their partners.

The country dance ended, we went into the dining-room for supper, and there, to Edward's and my great delight, we saw standing by itself on a low table, a large, red earthenware milk-pan, full of brandy and raisins, which Charles immediately proceeded to set on fire. It was a glorious sight to see the bright red and yellow flames rising out of it, and making it look like a witch's cauldron, and to see Charles dash his hand in and bring up a handful of raisins, and shake the fiery drops from his flaming fingers. We all gathered round the pan, my mother hovering about us to see that no harm happened, and especially cautioning Miss Standish, whose light dress might easily have caught fire. It was a long time before I could summon up courage to put my hand into the flames, in spite of Edward's saying, 'Look, May, look, I am not afraid,' and stretching out his arm, and then drawing it back when he felt the warm breath of the fire, and at last, spurred on by a laugh from all around, dashing it furiously in, and finishing his sentence by assuring me it did not

hurt. At last, however, I ventured to do the like, just as the spirit of the brandy being exhausted, the flames were flickering low. When we had extracted all the fruit, and the elders had taken their more substantial refreshment, we returned to the drawing-room, and Eleanor had her dance with Charles; as for Agnes and me, we never dreamt of such felicity, and jumped about together, if not as happy as at that moment she was, yet without her anxieties, and sore sense of disappointment. Miss Standish very good-naturedly danced with Edward, running after him whenever he went wrong, which he perpetually did, in spite of all her endeavours to start him in the right direction. I can see him now racing down the middle with her, and evidently thinking the great thing was to go as fast and get as far as possible, but she had younger brothers and sisters of her own, and did not seem to mind his riotous manners; indeed, had she been alone with us, I suspect we should have found that she was not at all too old to enjoy a good game of play, but she seemed then a little afraid of being thought childish, and glanced at Charles, and checked her companion's pace once or twice when she caught his eye, as if she feared that he would think her undignified. But she need not have been afraid, Charles thought nothing of her but what was pleasant. When the dance was over, he came and stood beside her, until the carriages were brought round, thanking her for all

her exertions that evening, and assuring her that she had won golden opinions from everybody by the grace and sweetness of her acting. I do not think she had, however, excepting from him, for all my father said on the subject was, 'She is a pretty, good-humoured girl, but no actress,' and Charles did not venture to contradict him.

The next day was a very sad one to everybody; Charles seemed dreadfully out of spirits at going away, and poor Edward was to be taken to school for the first time. My father went with him, and the three were to have started together, but Charles wished to call on the Standishes, which would take him a little out of the direct line, so it ended in his going alone. We saw very little of him, for all the morning he was shut up with my father and mother, and when he came out, he seemed more unhappy than ever; yet he was to pay his visit, which at first they seemed to object to. He looked so sad, and stood by the fire in my mother's dressing-room so long silent, that at last I ventured up to him, and said, 'Cousin Charles, why do you seem so unhappy? what are you thinking about?'

He smiled very sadly, 'I am doing what is very foolish, May,' he said, 'I am wishing I was only two or three years older—only old enough,' and he paused, sighed, and then added, 'but it is no use, no use thinking about it.'

He started on his journey before my father; we

went down to the front door to wish him good-bye and see him ride away.

‘Poor fellow,’ said my mother, ‘I am afraid he is very unhappy.’

‘Silly fellow, I should call him,’ my father answered, with an indulgent smile, ‘who would have thought of his taking such a fancy into his head at his age?’

‘It is very unfortunate,’ my mother replied, in her compassionate voice, ‘but I do not see how *we* could do otherwise.’

‘Certainly not, and, my dear, you need not vex yourself, he will get over it. Charles’s heart is something of the softest, he will take many such a fancy into his head, and survive them all—such disappointments don’t kill a man. Now, Edward, my boy, here is the gig coming round, get your hat and great-coat, and show your mother and sisters how bravely you can say good-bye.’

And thus encouraged, Edward bade us farewell with only a stifled sob, and in a very few minutes he and my father were out of sight.

## CHAPTER VI.

## COUSIN CHARLES.

'Farewell, thou best and dearest, and a long and fond  
farewell,  
May those that love thee follow to the land where thou  
dost dwell;  
Like that blest star which led from far the Magi to their  
God,  
May'st thou guide us in the pathway that thy feet in beauty  
trod.'

THERE seemed an unusual silence and sadness in the house for some days after Charles and Edward had left us, but slowly, of course, we grew used to the separation, and ceased to fancy that we could not do this, or go here, because Edward was not with us. It was, however, a dull winter, and I recollect that we had a long succession of wet, warm weather. One incessant, monotonous drip, drip, went on all day; the spring-meadow was under water, and deep drains had to be cut across the lanes, rendering them impassable. Every night I went to bed saying, 'I hope it will be a fine day to-morrow,' and every morning I got up to the same grey leaden sky. A low fever broke out in the parish, and two or three old people, and several children, died of it. It seemed to me

that the church bell was always tolling. I have no recollection of our having had any fears for ourselves, but my father and mother had doubtless many for us. Marian took the infection, and was shut up with her grim old aunts for some weeks, and we, of course, were not allowed to see her. Everything was so sad ; there was an indescribable dreary look about the country, pools of water standing in front of many of the cottage doors ; and the churchyard became such a swamp, that I often thought with a shudder, what cold, damp, uncomfortable places the graves must be. I think my principal occupation during playtime that winter, was kneeling up in a chair in my mother's dressing-room, looking out of the window, and watching the rain, 'dreaming strange melancholy dreams about the Flood, and filling my mind with wild pictures of its desolation and misery.

No doubt my depression and lassitude were the result of the weather, although it never struck me as anything unusual. February, or Fill-dyke, as it was formerly very judiciously called, came, however, to an end at last, and March set in with a strong easterly wind, and sharp frost. All the pools of water were frozen, the roads were like glass, and many of the meadows were beautiful smooth sheets of ice. Charles wrote us word from Oxford that there had been no such skating before since he had been at College. The meadow adjoining their college had been nearly all of it

flooded, and now the sudden frost had frozen it in the most perfect manner, without seam or wrinkle. We had had about a fortnight of such weather, when my father one morning had a letter from Mr. Hall, the tutor with whom Charles was reading, and I noticed his countenance change as he read it. We were at breakfast, and my mother was looking anxiously across the table at him. As he came to the close of the note, which was not a long one, he caught her eye, and replying to her glance, he said, 'It is from Mr. Hall, my dear, Charles is ill.'

'Very ill, Papa?' we asked, with one consent.

'I am not quite satisfied with the account,' he continued, speaking more to my mother than to us. 'Mr. Dillen says no present danger, but—' he paused, 'in short, I think I shall drive to Oxford and see him.'

He handed the letter to my mother, the gravity of whose face increased as she read it. When she had ended, she said, 'Yes, pray go. I cannot call it a comfortable account. Will it be possible, do you think, to move him?'

'Not here. You must not think of it; remember it is scarlet fever.'

I know not what idea I attached to the words, but it sounded in my ears like the plague.

There was not much more said during breakfast-time, but Mr. Hall's letter was taken up and read again and again, as if in their anxiety they could

find some fresh information by studying it. We watched them reading it with such wistful eyes, that at last my mother said, 'May the girls see it?' and on my father's nodding assent, she put it into Eleanor's eager hand. Agnes and I stood on either side of her as she read it, but it did not seem to us so prophetic of danger as it did to them. In our ignorance, we could not give just weight to the absence of those hopeful expressions which they had in vain sought for. Stimulated by a child's faith in the strength of life, I ventured to say, 'Will he not be soon better, Papa? Will you not bring him home with you?'

'I am afraid, May, he answered, 'it will be a long time before he is well again, and longer still before it will be safe for him to come here.'

My mother was full of anxious thoughts for poor Charles's comfort; she was harassed by the doubt, only too reasonable, as to whether he would be properly and carefully nursed. She dreaded lest in his hour of need he should want the love and tenderness he so well deserved. She feared to trust him to the care of strangers, feared lest he, so precious, so beloved, should suffer from neglect or carelessness. She urged my father, nothing loath, to remain with him.

'I shall send the servant back with the gig to-morrow morning,' he said, 'so you may depend on hearing. Unless I find Charles greatly better than



I expect to do, I shall certainly stay over Sunday. I will write to Wootton to take my duty.'

'Pray do,' she answered. 'I shall be so much more comfortable when I know that you are with him. There is a little basket in the gig with jellies and things which I thought he might like to have.'

'My dear, I can get him every comfort of that sort at Oxford.'

'Yes,' she said, the tears standing in her eyes, 'but I had rather send it. Tell him how much I long to be with him. My kindest love.'

'And mine, and mine, and mine, Papa,' we all exclaimed, as he turned to leave the room.

We watched him get into the gig and drive off. All day I was haunted by the question I dared not ask, 'Will he die?' I looked in my mother's face, and saw she was unhappy. I watched her when she entered her bed-room, and shut the door, and guessed she was praying that it would please God to restore our dear cousin to us in health and strength. I looked into Eleanor's eyes, and saw it was all she could do to keep back the tears. I knew when she turned away and hid her face from observation, it was because they were flowing over her cheeks. I saw no comfort anywhere, and in anxiety and fear that weary Friday wore away. The next morning, when we went, as usual, to read the Psalms and Lessons to my mother before breakfast, she sent Agnes into the hall to see if there was any letter from my father, and in a

moment she came flying back with one in her hand. Hastily it was torn open, and its contents devoured :—‘I have seen Dillen,’ he wrote, ‘and he assures me he knows no reason at present why Charles should not do well. The fever is not particularly high, but, of course, at this stage of the disorder, he cannot speak confidently. It appears that Charles has had a bad cough for some weeks. He says himself that he caught a cold one day after skating, and has not been quite well since. He is in good spirits, and very cheerful ; he sends much love to you and all. He will make me add his particular love to Nelly. I have also seen Mr. Hall, who speaks most highly of both his conduct and abilities. He says he considers him a youth of unusual promise, and hopes, please God, he may live to justify the high opinion which everyone has formed of him. His nurse is a pleasant-spoken woman, and his rooms are clean and comfortable. You will get this to-morrow morning, and I shall write again by William, who will reach Mitchellmore about three o’clock, but you must not expect any change for the better yet.’

Long before three o’clock we were all on the look-out for William, and a little after that hour, he made his appearance. There was not much difference in the account : Charles had had some sleep in the course of the night, and the fever was not higher ; but on Sunday a few lines written late on Saturday evening, spoke of some amendment, and

on Monday, a longer account conveyed to us the happy news that he was better, the fever was decreasing.

To our ears, 'to be better,' was equivalent 'to being safe,' and we talked gaily of his return, and almost expected him to come home with my father, although we were assured to the contrary. My mother was, of course, less confident, but when Wednesday and Thursday brought continued good reports, when Mr. Dillen declared that he considered the disease conquered and the danger passed, even then *she* felt at rest and satisfied; and on Friday morning William was despatched with the gig to Oxford to bring my father back. All the usual precautions against conveying the infection were taken; a fresh suit of clothes were sent in the carriage, that he might not return to us in any of the things he had used whilst attending on Charles; and late in the evening he arrived, somewhat worn and weary, and less cheerful than we had hoped to see him. He sat in his usual place beside the fire, answering all the questions that were asked him in a grave, depressed voice, until at last my mother said, 'My love, you do not seem quite satisfied. Was Charles less well when you left him?'

'No, I believe not,' he answered, 'Dillen assured me he considered him progressing most favourably, but poor Charles has altered very much in the course of the day.'

‘Altered!’ she exclaimed. ‘Worse do you mean?’

Again he said, ‘No. On the contrary, I am told he is better; but he is greatly out of spirits about himself. He did not like my leaving him, and I have promised to go back to him on Monday. Poor fellow! he is very weak and low.’

‘His feeling so weak,’ said my mother, ‘is a proof that the fever has left him, and accounts for his depression.’

‘Yes, that is just what Dillen says, but it is painful to hear his despair about himself. “I shall never see you again,” he said when I left him. “My thanks and love to my aunt, and love to Nelly, and Agnes, and May,” but he could hardly speak.’

‘Poor dear fellow!’ she replied, her eyes filling with tears. ‘But you were satisfied with the care that was taken of him?’

‘Yes,’ he said, ‘and Dillen was to see him again late this afternoon, and promised he would write to me the last thing to-night. We shall hear to-morrow.’

There was a pause, and presently my father added, ‘He pines so much for wine. He took my hand, and pleaded for it like a child, but they say he must not have it. Well,’ he continued, in a more cheerful tone, ‘if I hear a good account to-morrow morning from Dillen, I shall be satisfied.’

We could scarcely understand my father’s sadness when everything seemed so promising. But

he was influenced by poor dear Charles's prophetic views of his own fate, which nothing that he had been able to say had dissipated. Charles had insisted on his administering the Holy Eucharist to him, and had mentioned various little gifts, keepsakes, which he wished to bequeath to those whom he had so loved, and who had so loved him in this life. We did not know this then, but we knew it afterwards. The next morning's post brought a few lines from Mr. Dillen. 'Mr. Charles Lisle,' he wrote, 'continues to progress favourably. There is no return of fever, and in a day or two I think it will be safe to give him the wine he so much longs for. You may rest assured that I will pay him every attention.'

Oh! had he kept his word, Charles would have recovered to have blessed and gladdened us again with his beloved presence. But we could not see into the dark future, and the report and the promise increased our confidence. My father and my mother talked cheerfully of the time when he might be moved from college, and settled that he must go to the sea-side to recover his health and strength, and I remember my mother saying with a smile, 'that she should leave my father to carry on our education, and go herself to nurse her dearest Charlie.' Indeed, we all felt as if a load had been lifted off our hearts, and our spirits rose, and we were happier than we had been for days. I recollect well that in the afternoon Eleanor told

Agnes and me one of her charming stories, and read us some letters she had written, which greatly entertained us. I knew not wherefore, but as I listened, I sat gazing abstractedly out of the window, and watching the dark, dreary clouds which drifted over the sky. There was a black scowl over the whole face of the heavens, which looked to me portentous of a storm. And a streak of sunlight which streamed through a rent in the dark grey woof of vapour which hung in many a cumbrous fold over the earth, only seemed by the force of contrast to make one more sensible of the gloom. The leafless branches of the trees looked more gaunt and bare and death-like than usual, and as Eleanor introduced some touches of the wonderful and mysterious into her tale, I remember converting first one shadow and then another into something ghastly and wizard-like.

Perhaps the turn of thought which my imagination had taken in the afternoon, was the reason why the high stormy wind which arose at sunset seemed to me so much more melancholy than usual. As the night advanced, it grew more and more violent, driving the rain against the windows with a shriek and a sob, which from this early association I can never now hear unmoved. I remember feeling my bed, which stood against an outer wall, rock as the tempest beat its heavy wings against the house with a furious howl, and listened as it seemed, spent and weary, to be moaning in the

distance over the impotence of its efforts. There was always to me something supernatural in a high wind, even when, as a very little child, I used to watch the fir-trees nodding their heads, and tossing their long thin branches in the air, and fancied they were all violently scolding each other. But that night I thought it sometimes sounded like a single fiend raging round the premises, and sometimes like a whole troop rushing on together to demolish us. I cannot say how many hours I had lain awake, but the night must have been far advanced, for my father and mother had long ago retired to rest, when I fancied I heard a noise which was neither wind or rain. I listened, my ears painfully sharpened by the excitement of my nerves; for a second every sound was lost in the violence of the tempest, but as it died, sobbing away, I caught the noise again. It was the crash of the sweep-gate, and instantly after I distinctly heard the tramp of horses' feet on the gravel. I had hardly time to be sure, ere once more the wind came rushing along, and left nothing audible but itself, but mingling with its breath, I fancied I heard a loud shout, and amid the rattling of the windows and shutters thought I caught the sound of the front door bell. I was now thoroughly frightened, and sitting up, listened breathlessly for the next indications of I knew not what. There was a moment's pause, and then there came a crash, another loud halloo, and a violent knocking

at the door, whilst something struck the window sharper than rain. I jumped from my bed, and running to Eleanor and Agnes, shook them out of their sleep.

‘Listen, listen!’ I cried, ‘something is the matter!’

In another minute we were all three standing trembling together in the window.

‘Oh! what can it be?’ Agnes exclaimed. ‘What can it be?’

We were not kept long in suspense; there was a pause, the wind seemed holding its breath that we might hear, again the bell rang a long peal, and someone shouted out at the top of his voice, ‘Halloo! halloo! express! Oxford!’ The words struck our ears like a knell: there was a gasp, a sob, one cry of anguish, and then we flew together to the door of my father’s room to rouse him. It was the other side of the house, and he had not yet been disturbed. It was locked, but we shook it with all our strength, and bursting into a passionate weeping, called out as we could find breath and voice, ‘Papa, Papa, Charles, Charles!’

‘I am coming,’ my father said, ‘I am coming,’ and we heard my mother’s voice, half in tenderness, half in expostulation, saying, ‘My dear children.’ In another minute he opened the door, but as he did so, poor Eleanor, who had sunk on her knees, fell forward on her face, in a brief insensibility. He raised her, and laid her



on the bed, whilst we in vain tried to explain to him what we feared ; but at that instant the bell again rang, and catching the word 'Charles,' which was all our sobs allowed us to utter, he at once comprehended the truth, and mutely caressing us with his hand, he hurried to the door, whilst my poor mother, turning first to one and then to another, strove to learn something which should justify her in thinking us mistaken. But, alas ! were we wrong in the words we fancied we had heard, what else could it be ? It is only sorrow and misfortune that travel to us express, and unexpectedly, in the dead of night, (happiness admits of delay, it is only misery which cannot tarry,) and she felt that the tidings must be evil even whilst she argued against our conclusions. We listened to the unlocking and unbolting of the front door, heard the entrance of the messenger, and the murmur of question and reply. It did not take long to ascertain the truth, and in less than five minutes my father re-entered the room. He spoke slowly, and with evident difficulty, in short detached sentences.

'I must be off as soon as possible. Yes, you are right, it is an express from Oxford. Charles is much worse, and has asked for me. There is Dillen's note,' and he put it into my mother's hand. 'There is no hope !' and he coughed down the emotion which was choking him, and after the silent struggle of some seconds, groaned out, as he

quitted the room to prepare for his journey, 'Oh God, that I had never left him!'

'Oh, take us with you, Papa,' we cried. 'Let us see him once more!' and Eleanor, catching his hand, said in a voice of passionate entreaty, 'Oh, take me with you!'

It was more than he could bear, and he hurried away with a hasty 'It cannot be.'

'Oh! it is cruel! cruel!' Eleanor exclaimed, but my mother calling us all to her, put her arm round her, and leaning her head on her's, said with streaming eyes, 'My darlings, I do not ask to go, for your sakes I am contented to remain, and yet you know I love him as much as you can do. There is Mr. Dillen's note, read it; we should none of us most likely see him, even though we went.'

We took the note and read it. It was short, an unexpected change had taken place in the nature of the disorder. It had become typhus. He was sinking rapidly. If my father wished to see him again alive, he must start the instant he received the express, but even then there was small hope of it.

'Small hope,' but that that small hope might not be made yet smaller by unnecessary delay, he had, ere he returned to us, despatched the messenger for a post-chaise and four. Almost before it seemed possible, we heard the rattle of the vehicle. It was two o'clock in the morning, and the storm

of wind and rain was raging as fiercely as ever. My father gave himself no time to say adieu ; a look was his only farewell, but that look showed us his face pale and rigid, his brow contracted, his lips pressed together, as if it required all the proud hardihood of mankind to wrestle with his grief, and keep down his agitation. The carriage had hardly pulled up at the door, ere he flung it open and sprang in. My mother was yet struggling for voice to send a last tender message, should he be so fortunate as to find poor Charles alive and sensible, when the crash of the gravel beneath the wheels announced he was already gone.

Many and many a time in after life, I heard my father describe that hasty journey, until it almost seems to me when I think of it as if I had actually accompanied him. He had eighteen miles of a very hilly country to traverse, and the first six by cross-roads, good enough in summer, while nearly impassable in winter. But the horses were tolerably fresh ; the light chaise was a mere nutshell in point of weight, and they rushed along with a speed which almost satisfied his impatience. Through rough and smooth, through wet and dry, up hill and down, in and out of the ruts, they seemed to gallop on at one even pace. My father sat gazing into the dark stormy night, striving, as one object after another came flashing out in the light of the lamps, to ascertain his progress ; with his watch in his hand, counting the precious

moments as they ebbed away, and remembering that with each stroke the sands of *his* life ran lower. At last they entered Oxford, swung round the last corner, and the reeking horses stopped before the closed gates of the college. He sprang out beneath the vaulted gateway, and rung for the porter; there was the delay of a few moments, to him how insupportable! then the bars were lifted, the bolt withdrawn, and he entered. The silent quadrangle echoed with his hasty tread, and again he had to wait at a second closed gate ere the tardy porter rejoined him with the keys. True it was but a second, but the delay seemed fatal to his hopes. 'Good heavens, how slow you are!' he impatiently exclaimed. And in spite of the rebuke, the man would barely keep up with him. On through another court he passed, another pause, before a door, a winding staircase, and then he entered poor Charles's rooms. He dared not ask if he were still alive, but silently he approached the bed, he put back the white curtain, and the light fell on the sharpened features. Too late! too late! Oh, surely, surely, of all the bitter cries which can be wrung from human hearts, that is the bitterest! Too late to cherish, too late to comfort, too late for aught that love of man can do!

I need not paint his grief or ours; if anything could have added to our sorrow, it was the conviction that the tender care and nursing of home might

have saved him. Had he had the wine he pleaded for so sorely, he had not died ! But thinking the danger past, Mr. Dillen never went near him from Friday afternoon, until he was sent for on Saturday evening, when he came and found him dying. In the hours during which he had been left alone, for the carelessness of the doctor seemed to the nurse to justify an equal inattention on her own part, the fever had changed to typhus. No uncommon thing, and, therefore, a danger which Mr. Dillen should have provided against. Too late he was given the brandy which a little earlier might have saved his life. When the change in his condition was discovered, he was still sufficiently himself to ask for my father, but ere the messenger could quit the college, the lamp of life flickered low in its socket, and long before he could have reached Mitchelmore, the last spark was extinguished.

It was years before we knew the whole truth ; my father feared to afflict my poor mother too deeply by telling her at the time that all had not been done that might have been. He kept to himself the bitter knowledge that greater skill and greater care might have saved him.

I know not how we got through that miserable night, but hope is strong in young hearts, and in spite of ourselves we did not, could not believe that Charles would die—with returning day-light, our faith in life seemed to gather strength, and the

messenger my father sent to tell us 'all was over,' found us, or at least me, unprepared for the news. He did not return immediately himself, as he remained to make arrangements for the funeral, or rather for the transport of the body of our lost idol to Mitchelmore.

When he came back, I remember how we wept on first seeing him, and well I remember his taking us all three into the dining-room, and talking to us of the sure and certain hope in which we lay our dear ones in their graves. He spoke of the Communion of Saints, the Resurrection of the Body, and the Life Everlasting, until composure and peace sank into our aching hearts, and even Eleanor ceased her weeping. He spoke of the tribulations of this life, (and young as we were at that moment, we could echo his words,) and of eternal happiness in heaven.

Then, taking his Bible, he read us such passages as he deemed most proper for us, ending by that wondrous description of the Holy Jerusalem to be found in the book of the Revelation of St. John. And as I listened with my head bowed upon my arms, all outward things shut out from my senses, beautiful visions flitted across my mind of the jewelled gates, the gold-paved streets, the crystal sea, the shining forms that tread its rainbow shores. And my father's voice sounded in my ears like a triumphant strain as he pronounced the words, 'And the spirit and the bride say come, and let

him that heareth say come, and let him that is athirst come, and whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely.' Much that he said, of course, I could not follow, but his words made an abiding impression upon me, which to this day I can trace.

The silence and sadness of that week I pass over, but there was one amongst us haunted by a bitter sense of self-reproach, the agony of whose affliction at times knew no bounds. Shame kept her from confessing her folly to her mother, and Agnes and I were too young to have any medicine for such a grief.

It was on Saturday evening that our dearest Charles breathed his last, and on the Thursday following, through our blinding tears, we watched the hearse which bore his body come slowly up the lane. That night he was to rest amongst us again, and solemnly those who were to carry him to his grave the next day, carried the coffin into the house, and deposited it upon the tressels which had been placed in the study in readiness to receive it. When the men were gone, we all, my father and mother, Eleanor, Agnes, and I, went into the room. The shutters were shut, but through their crevices a level ray from the setting sun streamed in, and lighting on the coffin, seemed like some angelic messenger to speak to us of hope. We knelt beside him with a thrill of loving pain, we felt him near, 'so near, and yet how far!' whilst

my father offered up a few short prayers, that we might all meet together in a joyful resurrection. Eleanor was quiet then, she constrained herself to keep down her sobs, and with her hands tightly clasped together, shrank, as if with a sense of guilt, from too near an approach. In a few minutes we rose and left the room; the last thing that I remember noticing was the sunlight playing upon the brass nails which formed the initial letters of his name, and making them radiant like stars. Death was in the house, and with hushed steps we returned to my mother's dressing-room, each, according to our different capacities, feeling the bitterness, and yet the sweetness of having him once more near us. It was a solemn evening. My father and mother sat silent on either side of the fire-place. I laid my head on my mother's knees, that I might dream undisturbed by the fitful blaze. Agnes read, and Eleanor had pushed her chair back into the shadow, and sat with folded arms and contracted brow, a picture of precocious suffering. There was not a sound; eight o'clock struck, and no one had stirred, till at last my mother roused me by telling me to go to bed, and then I observed that Eleanor was no longer in the room, she had stolen out unperceived. I expected to find her in our chamber, but she was not there; and when Agnes came in an hour afterwards, she said she had seen nothing of her; we suspected that she



had gone up into Cousin Charles's room to weep alone, as she had often done in the course of that week.

And Agnes said she would call her, and asked me to go with her; and wrapping myself in a warm shawl, we went up together, and knocked at the door, softly calling her name. No one answered, and the silence seemed strange to us; but after a few moments, we opened the door and looked in. There was just moonlight enough to show us that the room was empty. Really uneasy, we stopped at the nursery, and inquired if she was there; but the servants had seen nothing of her, and with a reprimand to me for being out of bed, nurse laid down the black gown she was making, and charging us to go straight back to our own room, went herself to my mother. We did as we were bidden, but we left our door wide open, that we might hear what went on. In a minute or two, we heard my father and mother go down the staircase, and with a sudden thrill, we felt that they were about to seek her in the study.

'Oh, Agnes,' I said, 'she cannot have gone there alone.'

But Eleanor had a courage beyond our comprehension. She had gone there alone, gone to weep over the coffin from which she had seemed to shrink in our presence. But she had over-calculated her own bodily strength, and worn out by

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the agitation of the week, she had fainted on the threshold. Hastily they lifted her up, and at the touch of their hands she revived. They carried her into the dressing-room, and there my father left her to my mother, whose tenderness and counsel did not fail to assuage her self-reproach, and lighten her heavy heart.

The next day, according to the beautiful language of the Burial Service, 'we committed our brother to the grave,' striving to thank God that it had pleased Him to deliver him from the miseries of this sinful world, and meekly beseeching Him to raise us from the death of sin unto the life of righteousness, that at the last we all might hear those blessed words, 'Come, ye children of my Father, receive the kingdom prepared for you from the beginning of the world.'

I have little more to add ; there were many, both rich and poor, who felt for us, and in some measure, at least, shared our sorrow. Amongst these were the Standishes, to whom my poor mother wrote to announce our loss. As soon as it was proper, they called at Mitchelmore, and Miss Standish made some excuse for leaving the two ladies together, and joining us. Eleanor had gone out riding with my father, and Agnes and I were walking soberly in the walk in front of the house. We were very glad to see her, although we could not help her presence reminding us sadly of our happy Christmas. The tears rushed into Agnes's eyes

as we met, and Miss Standish, whose heart was perhaps as full as our own, wept also at the sight of her distress. When she could speak she said, 'I want you to tell me all about it—him I mean. I should so like to hear more than was just written in that note. Everything about his illness. We have been so sorry for you all, and I have been longing so much to come over and see you.'

We took her to a part of the walk more solitary and remote from the house. It was a mild spring day, and so we all three sat down on a bench, and then Agnes and I poured out to her the history of our hopes and fears, and all that we knew of his illness. It was a comfort to talk of him, and though we watched her tears as they trickled slowly over her soft young cheeks, we never thought her grief was more than sympathy with us. She seemed as if she could never be weary of the subject, and when we paused, she thanked us, and said she could never forget how happy we all had been at Christmas. She should always look back to the hours she had spent with us as the happiest of her life. She did not quite like to say, 'I shall never forget him,' but it was what she meant.

'There was nobody like him,' Agnes answered sadly.

'No,' she said, in a voice to the full as mournful, 'nobody. He had everything to make him precious to his friends; everyone who knew him must grieve for his loss.'

We were still talking of him when we heard the sound of the carriage coming round to the door; Miss Standish rose quickly, and said she must go. She held Agnes tightly pressed to her heart for a moment, then affectionately kissing her, motioned us not to come with her, and walked hastily towards the house.

We watched her put her handkerchief to her eyes often as she moved, as if she wished to wipe away the traces of her tears before she rejoined her mother. Perhaps his death was the first shadow which had darkened her heart, as it was the first which had darkened ours. It always seemed to me, in our after intercourse with her, that mindful of the days 'Long, long ago,' she had an interest and affection for us greater than our actual intimacy warranted. The remembrance of a common grief united us, and the early sorrow we had in a measure shared together, kept alive a regard which otherwise the separation of our lives would have extinguished.

And here let me lay down my pen, for as I look back, there seems to me to have been a pause in our lives at this period, during which we emerged from childhood into the more intricate paths of early womanhood. Some day, perhaps, I may narrate the stronger temptations and graver sorrows which overtook us in our farther journey. But if I do, it will be because they were only such as all meet with, and can, therefore, understand, and

not because there was anything extraordinary in them. It will be because in showing what the discipline of life was to us, some may be enabled better to understand their own histories, and be willing to learn something from the experience of others.

## PART II.

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### CHAPTER I.

MARIAN.

'And said I that my limbs were old,  
And said I that my blood was cold,  
And that my kindly fire was fled,  
And my poor withered heart was dead,  
And that I might not sing of love?  
How dared I to the dearest theme  
That ever warmed a minstrel's dream,  
So foul, so false, a recreant prove!  
How could I name love's very name,  
Nor wake my heart to notes of flame!'

I HAVE hesitated long ere I could make up my mind to disturb the ashes of the romance which occupied so large a portion of my youth. Old as I am, I feared that whilst there was no warmth remaining to interest others, it might call forth a bitter, discontented spirit, and awake old dreams better forgotten. But the fancy that it may be of use to the young has lured me on to speak, for we are all prone to believe, that however much we may have mismanaged our own worldly affairs, we

could point out to others the road to that unalloyed happiness and prosperity we have missed ourselves.

In spite of all my knowledge to the contrary, I cannot help writing, in the conviction that it is possible to persuade the young to learn wisdom from the experience of the old; that to put the head of sixty on the shoulders of sixteen is not so hopeless an undertaking as is generally imagined; and that were they but inculcated oftener, sobriety of expectation, and temperance of feeling, might be the companions of youth instead of the hardly-earned friends of middle life. I will endeavour not to preach, but I would fain leave to those who still enjoy the early summer of existence, the lessons that time and observation have taught me.

As we grew older, my mother gave up more and more of her time to our education; we read much with her and with my father, and masters from Wellsbury supplied all the instruction which was deemed necessary in music, drawing, and dancing. Our hours of study would, however, have been thought few in comparison with the modern system, and our accomplishments would scarcely have passed muster in these days. But Eleanor had a sweet voice and a light touch, and Agnes filled sundry sketch-books with slight, but graceful pencil-sketches of our home scenery, finding subjects, where many a better artist would have turned away, in an old gate, with an over-

hanging tree, a cottage by the road-side, a turn in the lane, a bit of copse-wood, a gnarled and twisted stem, drawing whatever she saw with happy ease, and with a fidelity which now renders her sketches invaluable. As for me, I neither played nor sung as well as Eleanor, nor drew as well as Agnes, but I did both to some very small degree. I was fondest, however, of music, and keeping it up long after most ladies lay it aside, did in the end acquire a certain amount of skill.

A retired country parsonage is not the best place in the world for meeting with adventures; nevertheless, we met with ours. In turning over the leaves of an old pocket-book of my mother's, my eye fell on this entry :—‘This day, with many, many fears, we married our eldest daughter to Major Henry Armstrong, and I pray God to bless her, and her husband, for evermore.’ The words have carried me back to the days of our girlhood; days which seem to me now, as I look back on them, to have been full of warmth and sunshine, and of a kind of pastoral happiness. Love came, however, to disturb our repose, and carry us away from our father's hearth; or, if left, to leave us there with a burden of sorrow and a well-spring of discontent. Eleanor was the first victim, and victim I may well call her, for hers was a love which, though successful, cost her dearly.

She was in the first flush of her beauty (and she



was very lovely) when she made acquaintance with her future husband. Barely twenty, her attractions were scarcely at their height, and she gave promise of being yet handsomer. But where was the hero to spring from to pay to her beauty the tribute of love and admiration so justly its due? He appeared in the last house in the neighbourhood where we should ever have sought him.

About half a mile from Mitchelmore stood an old farm-house, called St. Leonard's, the residence of Captain Thresher and his two single daughters, and their niece Marian. The Threshers were not exactly gentle-people, although Captain Thresher had once held a commission in the army, and appeared distantly connected with some families of distinction. He was a tall, bent, high-featured man, with broad, shaggy, white eyebrows, and a very bald head. His two daughters were the most grim old women I ever beheld in my life, and when we were children, we always called them the 'ogresses,' for which we were duly reproved whenever my mother heard us. Marian used to tell us dreadful stories of their severity to her, and to declare that if it had not been for her grandfather, she should have died of starvation and ill-usage. I doubt now whether she ever suffered the former, though her aunts looked quite capable of inflicting the latter. However, in spite of their forbidding faces and stern manners, I believe, as far as they knew how, they

meant to take care of her; but their violent tempers, and harsh punishments, no doubt produced in her that unscrupulousness with regard to deceit, which was, unhappily, one of her most marked characteristics as long as we knew her, and deprived us of almost all pleasure in her society.

But I must not leave you under the impression that St. Leonard's was an ordinary farm-house. It was as unlike any other place as they were unlike other people. It was a fragment of a building intended to be of great size, but which had never been finished, and though called Elizabethan, it dated back to the time of the last Henry. Its tall chimneys, all on the outside of the house, were wreathed with ivy, which hung in masses about their tops; and its solitary gable was crowned with a broken, but beautifully carved barge board, beneath which the martins built in undisturbed security. There was something indescribably green and rural in its situation, something that irresistibly reminded one of the cawing of rooks, bleating of flocks, and vernal scents and sounds. The noble trees stood so close to the house, that they seemed actually embracing it, and its one magnificent bay-window peeped out like a bashful beauty from beneath their giant arms. Around it lay a wide extent of green pasture-land, from some part or other of which the tinkling of the sheep-bell was never absent.

There was, and is, that charm about the place which a new building and new settlement can never have. Time has laid his pensive hand upon it, and mellowed it into a melancholy tenderness. I never look on it now without feeling that it is a home to be loved as only homes deep in the country can be loved. Ancient, but not decayed, its long line of mighty barns and ricks give it a hale and hearty look, perfectly consistent with its grey grave front and stone windows. A narrow shadowy lane, with timber hedge-rows, and high banks on either side, leads up to the house, and is still in the summer time a favourite walk of mine. And now, as with pain and toil I feebly tread it alone, I think of the days when we passed along it together, with fleet feet and merry voices. I gaze with my dimmed eyes on the familiar spots that look at me with 'unchanging faces, though we are changed and changing.' Here I remember how we clomb the banks, using the projecting roots as steps, and seating ourselves by turns on some sylvan throne, high above the road, played at—

'Queen Anne, Queen Anne, she sits in the sun,  
As red as a rose, and as fair as a nun,  
The king sends three letters, and desires she will read one,'

until we were weary; and there, just where the lane divides, and the sunbeams fall in a wider gleam across it through the opening trees, and rest on the mossy corner of that huge immemorial stone, Eleanor first met her husband.

It was early May, nevertheless we were walking after dinner. I remember we were eagerly discussing *Waverley* as we walked, which we were just then reading aloud, and were full of Jacobitism and admiration of Fergus and Flora. Our discussion was, however, interrupted by the sight of Marian and Captain Thresher descending the lane, the latter on the white pony he always rode, on account of his lameness, and some gentleman walking beside them. A stranger we immediately pronounced him, from his air and carriage, but knew not how to suppose him staying with the Threshers—not but that there was room enough in the house for him; indeed, to have a spare chamber was a point of gentility which Mrs. Martha insisted on, to Marian's cost, who had, in consequence, no better apartment than a long, dark kind of gallery at the top of the house, with most dilapidated furniture—but because, as far as we could recollect, no friend or relative had ever inhabited the room kept for their imaginary use. Relations they seemed to have none, or at least none that cared to acknowledge them. The gentlemen and Marian, however, drew near, the stranger's hearty laugh preceding them, and sounding cheerily as they approached.

Captain Thresher was a great admirer of Eleanor, and halting his white pony in front of us, he took off his hat with an air of old-fashioned gallantry, as he said, 'Well met, fair ladies. Miss

Lisle, give me leave to present to you my cousin, Major Armstrong. Major, the Miss Lisles, better known as the Three Graces.'

The Major made his bow with an air of ease, which amusingly contrasted with the stiff, solemn sweep of his companion's arm. He was a fine-looking man, not very tall, but well made, with rather small, good features, a healthy sunburnt complexion, clear blue eyes, light-brown hair, and remarkably white, even teeth. He looked thoroughly like a gentleman, and there was something prepossessing in the good-humour his countenance indicated. He seemed overflowing with spirits and merriment, his laugh was the readiest and most cheery imaginable; one would have thought that he had not a sin to shame and sober him, or a sorrow to sadden. He had been all through the war in Spain, and it seemed strange that he could have brought back so light a heart from such scenes of blood as he must have witnessed.

Promotion was rapid in the army in those days, and in spite of his military rank, Major Armstrong could not have been above six or seven-and-twenty.

The gentlemen were on their way to the Rectory, intending to call there, that Captain Thresher introduced Major Armstrong to my father, somehow it was brought to pass that we would turn back and accompany them. Eleanor

and the Major walking on either side of the white pony, and Marian joining Agnes and me. We kept at just such a distance from the others as enabled us to converse without the danger of being overheard, and I could see that Marian, very naturally, was not a little pleased with the unexpected arrival of this hitherto unknown cousin.

She seemed exalted in her own eyes, and to fancy she must be raised in ours by her relationship, however distant, to such evident gentility.

Marian had hardly exhausted the subject of her cousin's arrival, ere we reached the Rectory. I know not why that evening should be recollected, when so much that was far more important has passed away; but though I cannot recall the words, I can remember the topics of conversation, and the position of each person, and even their very looks. I was struck myself with Eleanor's unusual beauty, the bright soft bloom on her cheek, and the sunlight in her clear hazel eye. It was no wonder that Major Armstrong, as he sat talking to my dear mother, should follow her movements with stealthy glances as she busied herself with the tea-things.

'I wish you a better office, Miss Lisle,' Captain Thresher said, as she rose from her seat and brought him his cup of coffee, 'than waiting on an old man like me.'

And as Eleanor hesitated for a moment for an

answer, my mother turned and replied for her: 'Eleanor will never wish for any better employment than that of attending to the comforts of her friends; and the older they are, the more she will feel it pleasant to wait on them.'

'You make me wish, Mrs. Lisle, that I could rival Captain Thresher's white hairs,' Major Armstrong remarked, rising and taking up a position by Eleanor, which he retained during the rest of their stay.

I remember, very soon afterwards, that Marian left her place beside Agnes, and, drawing forward her chair, sat down on the other side of Nelly. She seemed bent on preventing her from talking to her cousin, for she repeatedly stooped forward and said something to her in a low tone, interrupting, in what I thought was a very troublesome and ill-bred manner, the conversation she was carrying on with the Major. Eleanor bore it very good-humouredly, only making a point of answering aloud all her whispered observations, as if to show her that she did not wish to talk secrets in the midst of the family circle. We commented on Marian's want of manner after she was gone, and agreed that there was nothing more *Missish* and silly than the exhibition of young-lady familiarities in improper places, and at improper times.

From that eventful evening our intimacy with Major Armstrong grew and flourished. I

think now that perhaps there was a little imprudence on my father's and mother's part, in so readily opening their doors for the admission of a stranger of whom they knew so little.

His visit to Captain Thresher was, at least nominally, one of business; he came ostensibly to see what repairs were necessary in the houses, farm-buildings, cottages, &c. owned by Sir Henry. Captain Thresher had no reason to speak ill of him, but he could only say that he found him an agreeable companion. My dear mother, who never suspected anyone of evil, and even always believed, when it was proved against them, that they were deeply penitent, and would be good all the rest of their lives, was immensely taken with him, and, I think, influenced my father into showing him more civility than if left to himself it would have been natural for him to do. The result was, that he soon obtained the permission of walking over from St. Leonard's whenever he pleased, and under one pretence or another, he did so frequently. A day seldom passed of which he did not spend some part with us.

He and Marian not unfrequently walked up together, and from something she one day said to Agnes, we concluded that she was not aware how much we saw of him. She told us also that her aunts were always trying to keep her out of his way, and lecturing her on the duty of discretion. Aunt Charlotte in particular watched her, and she



could not speak a word to the Major, or the Major to her, without their being what she called 'snapt up.' It was very hard upon them both, for of course they liked to be together, and the consequence of her aunts' suspicions was, that they took very good care to keep apart in her presence.

He did not take much notice of Marian, however, when with us, but, I suspect, made up for his neglect then, by devoting himself to her at other times. Once I came upon them suddenly, and was struck with their manner to each other. I was walking on the turf by the way-side, which made my footsteps inaudible, when a turn in the road brought me suddenly in front of them. Marian was sitting on the step of a stile, and Major Armstrong on the stile itself. The former blushed scarlet when she saw me, and stammered out something about being on their way to the Rectory. She was speaking eagerly a moment before, as I turned the corner; her blush and embarrassed manner recalled her voice, and the sound, unheeded at the moment it was heard, resolved itself into the words, 'I will if I can get away from my aunts.'

'You have taken a strange road to the Rectory to-day, Marian,' I replied. 'Why you must almost have passed it to come to this point.'

Of course I guessed that the Miss Threshers had not sent her out to walk with her cousin, and

that she had turned aside from her road to meet him.'

'One is not always bound to walk straight to one's point,' Marian replied, proudly. 'We have made a little detour, that is all, and were resting a minute before going on. There was no great harm, I suppose, in going by the wood instead of the road. However, since I have met you, it is unnecessary that we should go any further. I was only acting as my aunts' postman, and conveying this note to Mrs. Lisle; if you will be so good as to take charge of it, we may turn back.'

She put a three-cornered note into my hand, and looked at her companion to imply that she was ready to depart. But he was not, and, under pretence of being afraid lest she should be overtired, insisted on going on to the Rectory, that she might rest there. And there was a glance in his eye which seemed to say, 'it is more prudent.' She complied, therefore, but they only paid us a short visit. At parting she drew me aside, and said, 'You would oblige me by not mentioning to anybody where you met me to-day. I could not prevent Major Armstrong from joining me, but my aunts are so unreasonable, that they would be sure to think I could.' Of course I had no intention of saying anything on the subject. I thought her aunts quite as unreasonable as she did, and, though her deceitfulness shocked me, pitied her for the restrictions they sought to impose. My

ignorance of life prevented me from perceiving the danger from which the Miss Threshers would fain have guarded her, for, though severe, they were not uncareful guardians.

It seemed to me hard that she might not enjoy her cousin's society, the more so as, excepting ourselves, she had no young companions, the Miss Threshers not choosing her to associate with the families of the neighbouring farmers, and the gentry not choosing to notice her. They quite understood the difference between her position and that of Major Armstrong; they saw the probability of the intimacy being all jest on his side, and all earnest on hers, which bitter unpalatable truth they were for ever forcing upon her notice, injudiciously finding fault with him, and taunting her with the likelihood of her being imposed upon by his fine speeches and plausible manners. Was it wonderful if, as I fear she did, she trusted him the more for their insinuations against him, and snatched at the amusement and pleasure which they, however wisely, were so harshly denying her? I think not. At the time, such glimpses as I caught of her conduct I severely condemned; but the more one learns of the weakness of one's own heart, the more one learns to be merciful to the weakness of others. Now, I can only remember that she must have been greatly tempted, and was sorely punished, and I can no longer marvel that she did not walk

uprightly. I have little doubt that she disobeyed and deceived her aunts, and, in spite of their prohibition, spent as much time with her cousin as she possibly could, exerting all her cleverness to manage meetings, and to elude discovery. I would only plead for her, that it was not with impunity that she erred.

The note she brought to the Rectory the day I met her, contained our annual invitation to the village Maying, which always took place on the twenty-ninth of May at St. Leonard's. It was very unorthodox to have it then instead of on May-day, but I suppose, in a fervour of loyalty, it was so arranged out of compliment to the Restoration. It had certainly always been held on the twenty-ninth for some generations. We generally walked up after dinner, joining the dancers for half-an-hour, or so, when there was anyone for us to dance with, and spent the rest of the evening with the Threshers. That evening we walked up to the farm with greater expectations of pleasure than usual, our steps cheered even from our own door by the distant drumming, which was enlivened by the shriller notes of the other instruments, as we drew near the scene of festivity. As we reached the brow of the hill, I remember we paused to admire the view, and truly a prettier spot for a village Maying could scarcely be found, for before us lay a level greensward, across which the slanting sun was streaming, crowded with the

poor in their holiday dress, all busily dancing, while groups of the very aged and the very young were clustered round the stems of the nearest trees, with the old grey house immediately behind, standing out against a clear eastern sky, with here and there a pale rose-coloured cloud flitting above it, with touches of gold on its stone mullions, and beautiful purple shadows in every corner, amongst which the dark green ivy leaves glittered as they trembled in the evening breeze. Our admiration of the scene was, however, interrupted, for ere we turned to resume our walk, Major Armstrong came bounding over an adjacent gate, impatient at our long delay.

'Fifty times, at least, I have been to this corner in hopes of seeing you!' Major Armstrong exclaimed. 'And at last here you are. I was on the point of running down to the Rectory to ascertain what had become of you.'

He led Eleanor off to join the dancers, not, however, until he had laughingly asked my mother if she herself would not do him the honour, but scarcely waiting for her negative, ere he turned to the other. There was a larger party than usual, for two or three of the neighbouring clergy, with their sons and daughters, had joined, and Agnes and I were soon dancing likewise. As usual, I was claimed by Mr. Wootton, who, kind to us all, was especially kind to me, and of whose notice in those days I was not a little proud. He was a

clergyman, of whom my father entertained a very high opinion, and of whom we saw a good deal. I had grown tired, and was resting on the ground a little apart from the others, very well amused in watching the queer flourishes and capers which some of the boys and girls performed, when Marian came up to me. 'Look at that couple,' I said, pointing out a pair who evidently considered themselves first-rate dancers. 'See what good time they keep! They always contrive to dance pat to the music, and make the step and the note go together.'

But Marian scarcely looked. 'What is become of Eleanor and Major Armstrong?' she said. 'I saw them walk away some time ago.'

I had never perceived that they had left the dancers, and could only answer that I did not know.

'It is very unkind,' she continued; 'he was engaged to dance this with me. Eleanor should think of other people.'

'Shall we go and look after her?' I asked. 'She cannot be far off.'

Marian hesitated. 'I heard Grandpapa asking for her,' she said, 'otherwise I am sure I would not go, and very likely they will come back whilst we are gone.'

She looked round the meadow, but Nelly and the Major were nowhere to be seen, and so she agreed that we should try and find them. Our

search, however, was long in vain; at last, finding ourselves at the back of the house, she led me in, though protesting that they could not be there. We passed through the brewhouse, and went on by the dairy and buttery, and entered the kitchen, into which the setting sun was pouring a flood of amber light. It looked very picturesque and comfortable, with its old-fashioned seats in the ample chimney, and a high dark oaken screen shutting out the draught of the door. It was unceiled, and the huge rafters stretched from side to side, the floor was brick, the tables and benches were almost black with age, and from one corner went up a clumbering staircase, with a rail as heavy as itself, but not without a kind of beauty from its very roughness. I had never been in the kitchen of St. Leonard's before, and should have liked to have looked round on the brazen candlesticks that shone as brightly as if they had been gold, and the goodly rows of pewter cups and platters which adorned the dresser, but Marian gave me no time to make remarks. She hurried me on into the little parlour which they used as their common sitting-room, but it was empty, and then into the dining-room, where the table was already spread for tea, the tea-tray reposing at one end, with its diminutive cups and saucers of transparent blue-and-white china, and the thin spoons of fluted silver, with a cream-pot of the same metal, so small, that it seemed

impossible it should supply cream for the party, (not that there was any stint of cream at the farm, for you might empty it as often as you pleased and send for more,) while at the other stood the high silver candlesticks with two branches, and a wax candle in each, which were the pride and glory of Aunt Martha's heart, and which never saw daylight, excepting on some such solemn occasion as the present; the rest of their time they passed dressed in a tight fitting suit of wash-leather, in a dark cupboard which stood on one side of the fire-place. But Eleanor and the Major were not there.

'We had better go back, Marian,' I said. 'No doubt they have joined the dancers again long ere this.'

But Marian held up her finger, and when I listened, I could just hear a murmur of voices. She stepped hastily along the passage up to the front door, which was not quite shut, although closed, and stood listening a minute. I wondered why she did not open it and look out, but there she remained, motionless, as if transfixed. I do not think she could have heard, close as she stood, what was spoken on the outside, for the door was the original old door of the house, made with slabs of oak, and studded with iron. About three-quarters of the way up was a little peep-hole, covered with a strong wire fence, through which, however, you could see, with a lid which



slid over it on the inside. Doubtless it had often formerly been used to ascertain who might be without, ere withdrawing the bolts. But my surprise was great to see Marian slide back the little shutter and look through. When she drew back, she turned to me a face that was scarlet, and her eyes shone in the darkness of the passage like a couple of live coals. I quite shrank back from her, she looked so wild and fierce; but she caught hold of my arm with a vehemence which made me cry out. 'They are there,' she said. 'Go to them, tell Eleanor her mother wants her;' and letting my arm drop, she darted down the passage and up the staircase ere I had recovered my presence of mind sufficiently to speak. I stood irresolute, I knew not why I was so afraid to do as she bid me, and open the door. I called her back, 'Marian!' 'Marian!' but she would not return, and my voice sounded strangely loud in the stillness of the house. At the sound, however, the front door opened, and I saw Major Armstrong and Eleanor sitting together in the deep porch. Eleanor's head was turned away, but I was struck with the radiance of the Major's countenance.

Where are you wandering to, fair Lady May?' he said, 'and what are you doing here all alone?'

'I have been looking for Eleanor,' I replied, feeling thoroughly bewildered and puzzled. 'Captain Thresher has been asking for her.'

‘Indeed,’ he answered, with a glance at Nelly, but she did not turn her head or notice it. ‘And is he to have, Miss Lisle, what he asks for?’

‘I think we had better go back,’ she said. ‘Have we been long gone, dear May?’ and her voice was so soft and low.

‘I don’t know,’ I replied; ‘it was Marian that missed you. We have been looking for you, I think, about a quarter of an hour.’

We all three went back together, and by-and-by there was a demand for Marian.

‘I meant to have danced with her,’ Major Armstrong said, carelessly, ‘but as I cannot find her, I shall stay here,’ and he threw himself down on the grass at my mother’s feet, by whom Eleanor was sitting.

‘O for shame,’ my mother said, ‘that is most ungallant of you. She cannot be far off. Come, go and look after her; do not be lazy.’

‘Not I,’ he replied, laughing. ‘If she had waited for me here, I could not have got off. My present position is one of too much happiness to be lightly resigned.’

‘I wish Marian would make her appearance,’ my mother answered. ‘It is a shame she should lose her dance through your idleness.’

I thought so too, and having a vague perception that Marian was unhappy, and being anxious to administer consolation, slipped away to seek her in the house, and try and persuade her to

return with me. I ran up to her room, and knocked at the door. 'Marian,' I said, 'pray come out; your cousin has been asking for you.'

'Has he?' she answered, evidently moving across towards me; 'but I cannot come.'

'Pray do,' I entreated. 'Mamma wants you, and he wants to dance with you.' The last words were uttered with considerable hesitation, for I felt they were not strictly true.

'Did he send me that message?' she said, eagerly; 'but, no, it does not matter if he did. You mean it kindly, and I thank you; but go back and tell Major Armstrong that I know he does not want to dance with me, and that I will not come.'

'Don't stay up here by yourself,' I answered, 'it is so dull and sad for you; pray don't. We miss you so much; do come back to us.'

'Presently, presently,' she said; 'only go away now.'

And as I could get nothing more from her than repeated entreaties that I would go, I left her, and returned to my mother.

After a time we all went into the dining-room to tea, and 'Where is Marian?' was sharply demanded by her two aunts, and Aunt Charlotte stalked out of the room, and shouted her name in a loud and peremptory voice, until the whole place rang again.

A distant answer of 'coming,' and the opening

and shutting of a door, announced that she had quitted her solitude. I listened to the sound of her footsteps, and fancied that even now she came reluctantly. Slowly and quietly she entered, with an expression in her face which has often recurred to me since, there was such fortitude and suffering in it, and which struck me painfully even then. Her cheek was very pale, and there was a fixed, constrained look, about the eyes and lips, as if, by the force of her will, she was compelling the tears to keep back, and the muscles of her mouth to keep still. Her countenance was so unlike herself, that her Aunt Charlotte exclaimed, 'Goodness me, Marian, what is the matter?'

But Mrs. Martha, unheeding her niece's altered looks, followed in a different key. 'Pretty manners, Miss, upon my word, to run away from your company. Give Mrs. Lisle her tea. A high opinion she must have of your politeness!'

Marian advanced to execute her aunt's command in silence, but Major Armstrong arose and prevented her. With a good-nature, which made him appear to advantage, he put himself forward to divert the attention of the public from his poor cousin, and when the stream of general conversation which had been interrupted again flowed, he took the opportunity of endeavouring to express his condolence with her on the harshness of her aunt. I was sitting very near them, and could see and hear all that passed. Much that I had

long forgotten comes back to me now as I recall the scene. We three were apart from the rest of the party, having gathered round a little table which stood in the bay-window, and far enough off to make it pretty certain that what he said could not, amongst the murmur of other voices, be overheard—a circumstance of which, although it was nothing to me, whose presence perhaps was forgotten, my two companions hastened to avail themselves.

Major Armstrong was leaning on the back of Marian's chair; he was reproaching her with having run away, with having, as he said, cheated him of that dance which he had been looking forward to so long—and how different was the glance and the tone from that which he had used to my mother half-an-hour before!

'Did you forget it?' he said, 'or was it a piece of wilful cruelty? I half feel tempted to take up Aunt Martha's reproach, and say, "Pretty manners, Miss."'

There was a little pause, as if she knew not what to say, and he indulged in a few more complimentary flourishes; but suddenly she turned upon him, and in a voice which was fierce, in spite of its low tone, she said, 'Don't talk to me in that manner; I have learnt the value of such speeches, and beg I may hear no more of them. Keep them for those who can believe them.'

Her manner was abrupt and contemptuous,

but he answered in a smooth insinuating accent, 'How shall I talk to you then? Will you not believe how sorry I was not to be able to find you? Surely, my dear cousin, you cannot imagine that I would willingly displease you. Nay, do not turn away; do not look as if you meant to withdraw a friendship which has been to me invaluable.'

But in the same tone of subdued indignation she continued, 'You do not mean what you say. You have never meant anything. I scorn you for your falsehood. Yes, Major Armstrong, you stand before me a detected traitor. I could ruin your prospects, but I despise you too much to do so. You need not fear; I hold you beneath the vengeance I might take.'

Her words were uttered with a slowness which seemed only to make them more cutting. I marvelled how she dared confront him so proudly, and say such things. She looked at him with her burning eyes, as if she would have blighted him with their lightning. I was very young, and, perhaps, more than usually childish for my age; I did not at all understand what I heard. Marian had a violent temper, and when in a rage, often said very bitter things to us, and talked in a style of grandiloquence not very unlike her present tone. I was simply very much ashamed of what I considered her loss of self-command and audacity; I did not realize the full meaning of the words she

uttered, nor perceive that they were very different from the random taunts she made use of when in a passion. Still less did I see anything to admire in the courage with which she resented her supposed affront. I gazed at Major Armstrong, expecting some violent burst of displeasure, but none came. His colour heightened, and the expression of his face changed. And then he forced a smile, and said in a voice of careful gentleness, 'If you will quarrel with me, you must, but you cannot make me quarrel with you. We have been friends since the day we first met, and you cannot prevent my regarding you with feelings of—' And he hesitated, whilst she looked scornfully at him, but he almost instantly continued, 'Yes, Marian, with feelings of the warmest friendship; for what would my residence here have been, but for your companionship? Say what you will, do what you can, I cannot quarrel with you.'

I marvelled at the gentleness and kindness of his reply, and wondered why it did not melt her; but so far from doing so, it seemed only to add fresh fuel to her indignation.

'I know not,' she said, 'whether you are trying to provoke me to use the power I possess, but I am going to put the length and the breadth of the room between us, and I forbid you to follow; never let me hear you speak of friendship again. I have not much, it is true, but I will manage to do without yours.'

And she arose and crossed over to Agnes, and, placing herself with her back to him, began talking with the appearance of interest to her.

Poor girl! how differently everything seems to me now, as I write, to what it did then! I shall never know who was most to blame, and how far she had the right to feel herself ill-used; I can only guess, and it is not fair to impose my guesses on the world as truth. I write only what passed under my own observation; but even to my half-childish comprehension, in spite of all our minds being full just then of our own concerns and troubles, it was clear for many weeks she was passing through a period of great suffering without one friend near her to speak a word of sympathy or advice. All was shut up in her own heart, and dark indeed must that have been if it corresponded with the expression of her face, with her sullen mouth, and gloomy eyes.

I never again had an opportunity of seeing her and Major Armstrong together. I sometimes fancied in after days, that there was a conscious look in his face whenever we happened to mention *her* to *him*, and the mention of his name to *her* was sure to deepen the shadow in her dark eyes, and to flush her cheek. That she had wandered far far away into the paths of deceit and disobedience, I fear, is most probable, misled by a sentiment which she weakly suffered to usurp an entire sway over her heart. But the suffering she brought on



herself by such conduct, was severe and lasting. All the discomforts of her home seemed to fall on her with tenfold force. The harsh words which formerly she could rise up against and throw off, now seemed to crush her, and I have seen the tears rush to her eyes at a rebuke she would once have laughed at. Her bloom faded for a season beneath the corrosion of her secret sorrow, and the bitterness of her daily life. She kept away from us as much as she could, and when with us, was either cold and reserved, or unreasonably irritable, and ready to take offence. There was no human hand to help her to bear the burden she had bound on her own shoulders. And Agnes and I, when we talked of her and pitied her, felt we could do nothing beyond being patient with her petulance and moroseness. We were too young to understand how to win her confidence, and any timid efforts we made to induce her to trust to our friendship, she always bitterly repelled. She seemed, poor girl, to fancy that we were only seeking to gratify our own curiosity, and once proudly protested, she did not mean to afford us the opportunity of triumphing over her. Triumph! I am sure it was far from Agnes's heart; and as for me, I at least can only feel now that I have no cause to boast in comparing my conduct with hers! So altered was her manner and appearance, that her aunts, feeling the case beyond their management, entreated my mother to speak

to her. 'What was the matter,' they said, 'they could not tell. She had always behaved ill to them, and that they were used to, and did not mind; but now she was so cross to her grandfather, (who had always been kind to her,) and so inattentive and sullen, that they really could not endure it. Perhaps, if Mrs. Lisle would speak to her, she might be able to discover what it was she was sulking about.'

My dear mother took on herself the disagreeable task, and inviting Marian into her room, one day when she was calling at the Rectory, endeavoured to win her confidence. But it was in vain; the kindness and sweetness of her manner did indeed melt her in some degree, for she burst into a passion of tears, but declared, that wretched as she was, she must bear her wretchedness alone, that my mother could not help her, and that to her, least of all, could she speak. Then hastily contradicting herself, she protested 'there was nothing the matter, nothing more than the old story of the daily unkindness of her aunts,' and obstinately clinging to her last assertion, which, perhaps, was not wholly an ungenerous one, with a swelling heart she quitted the room, nor did she ever give my mother an opportunity of renewing the subject. Let me finish here all that I wish to say of her. It might have seemed as if in that solitary farm-house she must have been safe, but temptation found her out even there, as in some shape or

another it will every human being; not even the cloistered nun can avoid it, for if safe from all that can come to her from without, she carries with her to her cell her own weak, corrupt, and probably unconquered heart, and there learns from her own experience, that a man's foes are those of his own household. How much Marian struggled against her sorrow, I cannot say. She seemed to me to have been only soured by it, but the fruit often comes many a long year after the sowing, and we are not to suppose that the lessons of life produce no good because we can detect none. The world may be something disenchanted, there may be a soberer tone of feeling, a greater inclination to look beyond this life, without our being able to perceive it, and which slowly, very slowly, may ripen into an earnest striving for the better things of Heaven.

Six or seven years after the period of which I am writing, Captain Thresher died, on which event his daughters left St. Leonard's, taking Marian with them, and settled themselves at Wellsbury. She sometimes came and stayed with us, and we kept up a correspondence until she married, when, somehow, it came to an end. After the lapse of nearly a quarter of a century, we met accidentally. I could see then a strong likeness to what I remembered of her aunts, only she was a softened and somewhat refined edition. Her husband was a naval officer, and she had led

a scrambling kind of life from her determination always to keep as near him as possible, very different from the apparent monotony of mine.

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## CHAPTER II.

ELEANOR.

‘O, I beseech thee!  
If my obedience and blameless life,  
If my humility and meek submission  
In all things hitherto can move in thee  
One feeling of compassion, . . . .  
Let it plead  
In my behalf, who am a feeble girl.’

WHEN we set off to walk home from St. Leonard's, I remember that the Major and Mr. Wootton accompanied us; the former was in front with my father and mother, repeatedly disturbing the still night air with his hearty laugh; but the latter dropt behind, and joined Agnes and me, encouraging us to talk to him by the gentle, grave kindness of his voice and look, almost as freely as we should have done to my father. In those days we thought him quite an old man, with his bald head and quiet seriousness of manner, and always felt it a surprise when my father occasionally reminded us that he was still little more than thirty, and more our cotemporary than his.

Eleanor walked apart, wrapped in her own meditations, and said nothing to anybody as long as the gentlemen were with us. When they left us, she roused herself from her dreams, and suddenly exclaimed, 'How cold and strange Marian was when we took leave of her. Twice I held out my hand, and she would not take it, and she looked at me as if she hated me. Yes, there was a glance of such bitter ill-will in her eyes, that I really cannot call it anything less than hatred.'

'I suppose,' Agnes answered, 'that her Aunt Martha's rebuke had put her out of temper. I am sure we had done nothing to offend her.'

'No,' Eleanor replied, in a musing accent; 'but did you see her look when Major Armstrong said he should walk home with us, and when he wished her good-night, she folded her arms and made him a curtsey like any duchess.'

I made no remark; I had a kind of feeling of being in Marian's confidence, and that though she had told me nothing, and, indeed, I did not understand much, it would not be handsome in me to repeat what I had observed. I thought there was no need of speaking of her improper behaviour to her cousin, but my silence was a greater kindness than I imagined it at the time to be.

The next morning, Major Armstrong had a long conference with my father, and astonished him greatly by asking his permission to marry his daughter. My father, however, demurred, 'the shortness

of the acquaintance, the very little he knew of Major Armstrong, he did not mean to express any doubts, but only to act with that degree of prudence which such affairs required.' Eleanor's youth also was stated as an objection, and, finally, he declared he could hear nothing of the sort until Major Armstrong had obtained the cordial consent of his own father. To this ultimatum the Major was obliged to submit, 'which he did,' he said, 'the more cheerfully, as he felt confident of Sir Henry's approbation. He should set off for his home that very afternoon, and Mr. Lisle might look for his return in a day or two.'

He quitted the house without seeing Eleanor. My father was a little displeased when it came out that he had taken an opportunity the evening before of ascertaining that his demand would not be displeasing to her, and would not, therefore, allow him to see her then.

We soon knew what was in agitation. My mother told us, and my father was, I think, the only one of the party not perfectly pleased and satisfied. How brightly, and, I must add, ignorantly we talked, wanting Eleanor to explain it all to us, praising the Major, and assuring her that Sir Henry could not but be delighted. For a moment some thought of poor Marian glanced through my mind. I felt bewildered. Then she was not the one he preferred, it was very strange. But I must have misunderstood, there could have

been nothing between them. I can see Nelly now, with that beautiful tender light in her eyes, and bloom on her cheek, which comes from the radiance of the glowing heart within, and which nothing but love ever imparts to the face.

My mother, though as sanguine as we were, thought it necessary to preach doubt. 'You must not be too confident, my love,' she said; 'we know nothing of Sir Henry Armstrong, nothing of his character and circumstances. He may think you not grand enough for his eldest son, or he may not be able to make him such an allowance as would enable him to marry, or he may make such a demand on your father, as he cannot, in justice to his other children, comply with. Many a marriage is broken off from the money difficulties which arise.'

'But all that sounds so mercenary, Mamma,' Agnes answered.

'Yes, my dear, it sounds so, but such considerations must have their weight. It is only young people who can overlook the important part that money plays in all the affairs of this life, and in none more than in marrying, and giving in marriage. I hope everything will go smoothly between Sir Henry and your father. I am sure it will not be your father's fault if it does not; but I have often thought there is nothing stirs up the evil passions of mankind like having money to part with.'

That afternoon my father called on Captain Thresher, to see if he could tell him anything of Major Armstrong's past life, but he could get no information from him. Captain Thresher said that he had found his cousin very pleasant and gentlemanly, particularly good-humoured and intelligent, but as for his past life, he knew nothing of it. My father, therefore, on his return, wrote to an old friend of his, who lived at no great distance from the Armstrongs, and begged he would tell him anything he knew of the Major, and informing him why he asked.

Mr. Sidney was a very old friend indeed, and, besides, he was Eleanor's godfather. And there could be no doubt that for her sake he would speak the truth, whatever the truth might be; and my father warned Eleanor that his consent would depend upon Sir Henry's answer, and what he heard of Major Armstrong's character. But I question whether Eleanor ever listened to the last condition, so confident did she feel that there could be no harm to be said of one so charming; and even my mother asked, 'Why, my dear, should you imagine evil? The Major's countenance and frank open manners are a security for his integrity. I am much mistaken if you hear anything of him but what is good.'

Two anxious days passed; on the morning of the third, as I was sitting in the window of my mother's dressing-room, where we ladies usually



sat, I saw Major Armstrong walk in through the sweep-gate. 'Oh, Eleanor!' I exclaimed, 'here is the Major; and I am sure he brings good news, he looks so happy. Won't you come and look at him?'

But not a bit would Eleanor move. My mother, however, arose, and came to the open window; and the moment he saw her, he held up a letter in one hand, whilst he took off his hat with the other. My mother smiled, and bowed to him in return, and as she passed back to her chair, laid her hand tenderly on Eleanor's head, and said, 'It is all right, my love.'

In a very few minutes she was summoned to my father's study, and after an interval of about half-an-hour, she returned with an open letter in her hand.

She kissed Eleanor as she gave it her, and looked almost as happy and glowing as her daughter. 'Nothing,' she said, 'can be more handsome and liberal; Sir Henry writes as if he were really delighted. My dear Eleanor, even I could not wish you a kinder reception than he seems disposed to give. And as to means, you see he says that he will make everything easy; nothing can be pleasanter. One would almost imagine that he had been long wishing his son to marry, and was enchanted to find him in the mood.'

Certainly, one would have imagined so, for Sir Henry not only wrote graciously, he wrote as if

eager and anxious to secure the match; but then, as my dear mother said, with a little touch of family and maternal pride, 'He knew very well what an ancient and respectable family the Lisles are; what an upright honourable race; and, perhaps, he may have heard Eleanor herself favourably mentioned.'

'Well, my love,' she continued, seeing Eleanor lay down the letter, 'are you not pleased?'

'Oh, very! Mamma. Sir Henry writes only too kindly; I can never come up to the expectations he has formed of me.'

'You will do your best,' my mother answered, 'and our best seldom fails of its reward. But the Major is waiting in the drawing-room to see you.'

But Eleanor hung back, blushing, and half afraid, and looked shyly at my mother, who took her hand caressingly in hers, and led her out of the room.

She told us when she returned that my father was greatly pleased with Sir Henry's letter, and had behaved most cordially to the Major, and it was all sunshine and happiness, and everything seemed to promise fair for the future. Major Armstrong stayed and dined with us, and in the evening walked back to his old quarters at the farm. Ah! poor Marian! how sad a time it must have been for her!

My father told Eleanor that he could not consider her engagement quite conclusive until he

heard from Mr. Sidney: 'I have no particular reason for doubt. The Major's manner is very frank and open, and he gives me abundance of references to officers, most of whom are abroad. He says he has been so little in England, that, excepting his father, he knows not to whom to refer me; and I can scarcely place much dependence on Sir Henry's testimony, as he may know scarcely more of his son than I do, and certainly would not be disposed to believe any harm of him.'

We all, I confess, thought such expressions an excess of caution on my father's part; and Eleanor gave herself up to her feelings without scruple, and without any fears for the future. It seems to me now, that for the next two days, the house was flooded with sunshine, that never were the meadows so green, the flowers so gay, the birds so musical, or Eleanor so lovely. 'Queen of the summer,' Major Armstrong called her, 'and truly she looked it.'

It was on a Wednesday morning that my father said, 'I wonder I have not heard from Sidney.' Everyone else had forgotten that he had ever been written to, and now that he was named, the words suggested no warning. My mother only tranquilly answered, 'I dare say you will to-morrow.'

That afternoon, as usual, the Major spent with us. I remember it particularly, because my mother

wished to ask him to dine, and my father would not; he was uneasy at Mr. Sidney's silence, and said that he could not treat the Major like an accepted son-in-law. I think he scarcely knew how much my dear, kind-hearted, unsuspecting mother suffered Eleanor to be with him.

We were sitting tranquilly together in the drawing-room after tea, my father reading aloud to us, when we heard the sound of a carriage driving up the lane. He paused, as if in expectation of something, but my mother said, 'It is market-day; it is only Mr. Atkins returning late, as he often does.'

She was wrong, however; the vehicle stopped at the sweep-gate, and, again, in another minute at the front door. Who could it be? We were full of curiosity and excitement, anticipating something pleasant, though we knew not what. Could it be Sir Henry Armstrong, who, in his impatience to see Eleanor, had arrived thus unexpectedly? A very few minutes settled the question, for the drawing-room door opened, and Mr. Sidney walked in. It was nearly nine o'clock when he arrived, and he sat chatting with my father and mother of this person and that, but not a word of Major Armstrong. I fancied, afterwards, that I could recollect his looking gravely at Eleanor, and had noticed a tone of sadness in his usually cheerful voice; but I am not sure that we were any of us sharp-witted enough to detect the disagreeable

and painful errand on which he had come in anything that he either said or did. Conversation, supper, and evening prayers, occupied the time until we retired. I do remember, when we wished him good-night, his kissing Eleanor twice over, with a kind of compassionateness of manner, which made her look a little anxious. My mother, who left the room with us, and noticed the change in her countenance, said to her kindly, 'Don't be alarmed, my love. If there was any harm to be told of our dear Major, Mr. Sidney would have spared himself the pain of telling it by writing. Poor man, he was once much attached to your Aunt Mary, but she preferred Mr. Leicester, and Mr. Sidney took his rejection grievously to heart. I think he never hears of a wedding without a pang. He was thinking of her, I dare say, when he wished you good-night with such unusual tenderness.'

Her words quite cleared away the clouds from Eleanor's eyes, and she betook herself to her own little chamber, apparently without a care. I had one of my sleepless fits upon me, and laid awake for hours; but before Agnes and I were undressed, we heard my father come up-stairs, and fetch my mother down again.

'Now they will have a great talk about the Major,' Agnes said. 'I hope Mr. Sidney is not come to forbid the banns.'

As was natural, as the silence deepened around me, I became fanciful and anxious. Eleven

o'clock, twelve o'clock struck, and still the dread conclave remained below. I thought of those three who met in the secrecy of night to decide on the fate of the unhappy Constance; and of Eleanor, perhaps asleep, unconscious that the sentence which was to decide her destiny was even then being passed. I could not go to sleep myself until I had heard them separate. I imagined I could tell by the tone of a 'good-night,' could I but hear one, what turn the consultation had taken. One o'clock, and, at last, I heard the drawing-room door open and shut, and steps on the staircase. My eagerness quickened my faculty of hearing to an unnatural acuteness. Mr. Sidney, unaware how close we were to him, spoke the loudest. 'Good-night, I shall not see you to-morrow. You will let me know how she is, poor thing, poor thing. Mrs. Lisle, you will forgive me, and teach her to do so, for the pain I have inflicted.'

It was evident from my mother's voice that she was weeping. She answered, but so low and falteringly, that I could not detect what she said; even my father's accents betrayed emotion. 'I dread to-morrow,' he said; 'but, Sidney, I thank you again and again for having saved her from such a cold-hearted scoundrel as he must be. Good-night. We will not press you to remain, for it would be only painful to you.'

They entered their respective rooms; but I had

heard enough, and more than enough, to turn my doubts into certainty. For a moment, an inexpressible dread of the morrow seized me, and then I began restlessly to conjecture what fault Major Armstrong could have been guilty of, wondering, in my inexperience, that any grown-up man should do wrong. I did not realize what a grief was in store for Eleanor, although I imagined my father would put an end to her engagement. She was very happy before she knew the Major; she might be disappointed, but it would soon be as if she had never met him. Yet I did not like to anticipate even thus much suffering, and fell asleep, weaving a triumphant exculpation for him, and a cloudless destiny for her.

Agnes awoke me the next morning, when she herself was half-dressed, by exclaiming that Mr. Sidney was that instant going away. The exclamation brought back to my mind what I had heard during the night, and I told her all. But she would not believe me, and passionately exclaimed that she could not bear to think of such misery for poor Eleanor. Ah! she was two or three years older than I was, and more than two or three years wiser. She knew that it was no light trouble, no momentary affliction which awaited her and us. She might well tell me that I did not know what I was talking about, and refuse to believe words which she declared it was impossible I should have heard through our shut

door, unless Mr. Sidney and my father were speaking much louder than usual. She almost staggered me, almost convinced me that it was indeed a dream. But when we all met at breakfast, neither she nor I could doubt any longer. My poor mother looked as if she had been awake and weeping the greater part of the night. I saw her more than once stealthily wipe away the tears from her eyes; and my father had a deep furrow on his brow, which we all knew betokened not only grief, but displeasure. We saw that it was as much as ever Eleanor could do to swallow her breakfast, as she turned her wistful scrutinizing glances from one to the other, and I thought both sought to avoid looks they could not answer with encouraging smiles. We ate in silence, everyone afraid to speak, and all oppressed with the weight of the coming trouble. That weary meal came to an end at last, and my father, seeing Eleanor set down her empty cup, arose, and said, 'My love, I want to speak to you in my study, if you have finished your breakfast.'

She stood up, prepared to follow him, the bright colour flashing over her cheek for an instant, and then suddenly retreating, leaving her very lips white and cold. In a gush of irrepressible tenderness, my mother caught her hand as she passed her, and drawing her down, threw her arm round her neck, and said, 'God help you, my darling. Think how we all grieve for you, and love you,



and take heart;' and she kissed her pale cheek, leaving her own warm tears upon it. But Eleanor did not weep; steadily, and a little proudly she passed out of the room, looking round as she closed the door with a face that seemed struggling against conviction and despair. My mother wept without restraint when she was gone. Then, as soon as she could speak, she uncovered her brow, and turned to us and said, 'It is all at an end; Eleanor must never see *him* again.' She could not frame her lips to pronounce the words 'Major Armstrong.' She spoke in short broken sentences as she could find voice. 'He is utterly unworthy. It is not a case that admits of doubt. Mr. Sidney has carefully examined into the matter, and could find no extenuating circumstances. I cannot tell you more,' and my mother's cheek flushed. 'It is necessary that Eleanor should know, and your father will tell her, you must not question her about it.'

'But, Mamma,' I said timidly, 'perhaps he will deny it altogether.'

'I hope not, my dear May,' she answered; 'for even if he does, we could not believe him. The proofs are too clear.'

We went up-stairs to the dressing-room, and tried to occupy ourselves as usual, but it was a poor pretence of occupation. At about half-past eleven, I saw the Major coming up to the house; but oh! with what different eyes we watched him

now! He was whistling as he walked, and making a favourite dog of Captain Thresher's perpetually fetch and carry his walking-stick. He looked up at the window with the same sunny smile as hitherto, expecting, perhaps, that my mother would greet him as she had done a few days before; but there was no welcome for him. As he rung the door bell, Eleanor came flying from the study, and rushed with hasty steps up the staircase into her own room. For a while, my mother left her there to weep alone, but afterwards went to her, and presently they returned together. But could that pale, unhappy-looking girl, with the heavy eyes, and troubled mouth, be our beautiful, blooming Eleanor? What a change had that interview with my father wrought in her! Truly sorrow is no beautifier, even in the young, for it seemed to me that there was scarcely a trace of her natural loveliness left. She looked so much more fit to be alone than to be with us, that I wondered why she had quitted her room, but I soon guessed. Doubtless she had begged and prayed to be allowed one last look at him whom she was to see no more; and my dear mother could not refuse. With her own hands she wheeled forward an arm-chair into such a position, that the sweep, and gate, and lane beyond, were plainly visible from it. 'Sit there, my love,' she said to Eleanor, and gently opening the window, added, as if to give her an excuse

for obeying, 'the air will do you good, and I will just move the curtain a little forward to keep the sun from your eyes.'

Accordingly, she drew it just enough to prevent Eleanor from being visible from without, and there she sat and waited to take that last look which the tenderness of her mother permitted to her.

The interview below, however, was not a brief one. My father had, indeed, declared that he should cut the matter very short, and dismiss him with a word; but he found Major Armstrong was not a man to be so easily disposed of. I know not whether he attempted to deny the charge brought against him, but he protested against the injustice of his treatment, and vehemently declared he would not give up his engagement. He implored, he entreated, he appealed to my absent mother to plead for him, but my father was resolute; and when he saw that he did but humble himself in vain, he changed his tone, and told him, 'that if he expected an angel for a son-in-law, he would not find one; that he was no worse than other men, and he did not see why he was to be more punished.' But a man's sin does sometimes find him out even in this world, and certainly the privilege of sinning with impunity is not a privilege to be envied. He wound up by impertinently declaring, that men of the world thought nothing of such conduct as his, and that it was only because my father lived in such retirement

that he fancied it so black and heinous. To which my father sharply retorted, 'that it might be so, but a man of the world was then the last man to whom he would confide a daughter.'

And so they parted; the Major impetuously refusing to listen to the advice my father would have given him. In a moment he was out of the house, and Eleanor watched him as long as he was visible, and was, perhaps, half in hopes that he would look back, but he did not. He was eager to get away from the place, and walked rapidly, crunching the gravel beneath the heel of his boot, as if he found some relief to his excited feelings in crushing it to dust. My father told my mother that the interview was very unsatisfactory, as far as Major Armstrong's disposition was concerned, and that he had shown so little remorse and penitence, that he was more than ever convinced that Eleanor would not have had a chance of happiness with him.

But I fear I am growing too prolix, and must hasten on. Whatever fears my parents might have had as to how Eleanor would bear the heavy trial that had befallen her, were for the moment relieved by her behaviour. She bore up during the first fortnight with a spirit and forced cheerfulness which filled them both with admiration, and my father said 'he was proud of his daughter,' and would have done anything to have given her pleasure.

In these days, she would doubtless have been

taken abroad, or, at least, have been sent out on a series of visits amongst her friends, in hopes that constant locomotion and change of scene might have driven Major Armstrong out of her head. But beyond going to New Court for three weeks, she went nowhere. She seemed, however, to be steadily recovering her peace of mind, when, all at once, she ceased to make any effort to be cheerful, and sank into a melancholy and silence, which made every one anxious about her. She talked of an unconquerable attachment, declared she had done her utmost to forget, and could do no more. She said she could not command her heart, that love was stronger than her will, and that she should never cease to regret him, and to pine for what was forbidden her. It was all very romantic and high-flown, but it was not right. There is no such thing as an unconquerable passion, no feeling of the human heart, however wild and intemperate, which, by God's assistance, is not to be controlled, and even, if needs must be, crushed. You are never placed in circumstances in which you cannot do your duty. It was Eleanor's to leave off being interested in Major Armstrong, and had she striven against her inclination to dream of him, she would have speedily forgotten him; her feelings only became unconquerable when she ceased to struggle against them. I believe the excuse for her change of conduct, was a note she about this time received from the Major,

and which he somehow compelled poor Marian to give her. Eleanor certainly had one, for with her usual honesty and frankness, she showed it to my mother, and confessed to having read it, and I noticed an alteration in her from that day. I suppose he wrote very pathetically, for even my mother wiped some tears from her eyes as she read it, and, perhaps, the knowledge of his unhappiness increased poor Nelly's. She, of course, was not to answer his note, but she implored my mother to write with an urgency the latter could not resist, and she promised she would do so if possible. She had hard work to obtain my father's consent, for he rightly considered, that the Major's attempt to carry on a clandestine correspondence with Eleanor, was no reason for showing him any favour. But my mother, though allowing it was wrong, pleaded that she saw in his note indications of a genuine repentance, which a few kind, forgiving words might strengthen. She would take care that he should find no hope for the future on anything she said; she would apparently only write to forbid his doing so any more, and, lastly, she urged that it would be a comfort to Eleanor, and surely she had behaved so well, from first to last, so honestly and honourably in this final temptation, that she deserved so small a consolation. And so my father was conquered; but oh! my dear mother, there was greater mercy in his sternness, than in your indulgence! The let-

ter was written, and ere many mornings had passed, one arrived from the Major, addressed to Mrs. Lisle, containing, he said, merely his thanks, but they were thanks which occupied four pages of letter-paper. But why need I relate all the steps by which the end was achieved? That first letter was only the forerunner of many, many more. He persuaded my dear mother—how truly I know not, for very likely he deceived himself as much as he deceived her—that he suffered quite as much from the pangs of penitence, as from those of disappointment; 'she, and his love for Eleanor, had opened his eyes to his guilt; he was not a man of many words, not a boaster, but the future should bear witness to the sincerity of his amendment.' He wrote her a long history of his past life, from which it appeared that so adverse had circumstances been to him, so replete with temptations, that nothing short of a miracle could have held him upright; that, instead of wondering that he had fallen once, she should have wondered that he was not utterly reprobate and hardened. My mother kept his letters to herself, she could seldom, indeed, persuade my father to read them, and only induced him now and then to do so by claiming it of his justice; and to Eleanor, of course, she could not confide their contents, but it was difficult for her to resist the pleading glance which watched her as she read, and seemed entreating to be allowed to

share her tidings of him. There was, indeed, something very touching in Eleanor's sad, pale face, and in her large, melancholy eyes, into which a peculiar sorrowfulness always came whenever she saw Major Armstrong's handwriting.

Summer and autumn passed away, and as the winter set in, poor Eleanor's altered looks began to be noticed by everyone; months of pining and discontent were slowly doing their work, and undermining her health. My mother, in her tender watchfulness and anxiety, was the first to take alarm; in her wish to comfort her, she talked and allowed her to talk of the Major, and many a little passage from his letters, tending to show his change of spirit and continued love, was repeated for her consolation. Even my father at last admitted that the tone of all that he said was truly penitent, and that he might in the end do well.

It was one mild soft day in December, that my mother persuaded Eleanor to come out with us. Agnes was riding with my father, but she and I were going to walk to the other end of the parish, which lay towards St. Leonard's. Nelly was unwilling at first to make the exertion, and only reluctantly suffered herself to be persuaded. We were coming back, and my mother was trying to interest her in the poor consumptive girl we had been to see, and had just entered the narrow lane which led us home, when suddenly Major Arm-



strong stepped through an open gate, and stood before us. My mother caught hold of Eleanor's arm, as if fearful he would snatch her away from her side, and was half turning back, when an imploring gesture from him made her pause. 'This is not generous in you, Major Armstrong,' she said; 'see how you have frightened and agitated Eleanor. You must leave us instantly.'

'Would my absence,' he replied, 'restore strength to Miss Lisle?' And he looked earnestly at her, while poor Eleanor changed from white to red, and supported herself by resting her arm on my mother's shoulders. 'I have been hovering about here,' he continued, hurriedly, 'in hopes of seeing you, for the last four days. I did not dare expect to be so fortunate as to see *her*. Oh, Mrs. Lisle, give me a little hope. Go to Mr. Lisle, let him try me, let him name any time, three, five, seven years even, so that only I may look forward to a period when I may claim the fulfilment of the promise she made me.'

'And you,' he said, taking a step nearer Eleanor, who shrank a little back at his approach, 'will you not plead for me to your mother? One glance, nay, if you are forbidden to speak, surely you might deign once to look at me.'

But my mother interrupted him with a firmness and decision of manner which made him obey. She feared the effect of so agitating a scene on Eleanor. 'I cannot suffer you,' she said, 'to

talk in this manner. Eleanor, my love, you will go home with your sister. Take care of her, May; I will stay and hear the Major's apologies for this intrusion,' and as she put Eleanor's arm away from her, she whispered a few words which probably made her not unwilling to do as she was bid.

'So you will not even look at me,' he said reproachfully, stepping aside that we might pass.

For one second Eleanor lifted up her eyes, but I think they must have been too full of tears for her to have seen him very plainly. I looked at him unbidden, I suppose from curiosity, though not, I think, an idle one, and saw that he was really altered. The expression of his face was graver and sadder than formerly, and he had less colour. I cannot say he looked broken-hearted, as he said he was, but he did look somewhat unhappy. Not quite enough so, however, for me to be able to answer Nelly's tender question in the affirmative, when she asked, in a faltering voice, 'Did he look very miserable, May?'

My mother returned to the house much moved by her interview with the Major. The sight of him had revived all her former prepossession in his favour; always the advocate for mercy, always ready to plead for any offender, and to trust to any one's vows of amendment, no wonder she believed him, and exerted her powerful intercession in his behalf.

Eleanor flew to her as she entered, anxious to

hear what had passed, but my mother told her that she must have patience. 'Hope the best, my love,' she said, 'but your father must decide. I must go to him at once.' She went, but my father could not be brought to the decision she wished as speedily as she imagined. Long, long he hesitated, till Eleanor was well-nigh worn out with the alternations of her prospects. He could not share my dear mother's confidence in the future good conduct of Major Armstrong. Her womanly ignorance of the terrible strength of sin, of the power which actual transgression gives to Satan, and of the extreme difficulty of a return to God, together with the unusual tenderness of her heart, blinded her to the danger, which seemed to him so imminent. She saw the present suffering and distress, and trembling for Eleanor's health, spared no entreaties to induce my father to relent. She did not, I am sure she did not, make light of evil; she was the last person to do so, but she dwelt on the efficacy of repentance, and the justice of pardoning all sin to a penitent offender. She conquered at last, and my father said, 'that if in the ensuing spring Major Armstrong and Eleanor were both of them in the same mind, he would no longer oppose their marriage, but he must talk to Eleanor, and set clearly before her the risk she ran.' He did so, but Eleanor was too young to be frightened, too much in love to be distrustful, and too happy to notice the reluctance

of his consent, or the kind paternal anxiety which made his manner seem so cold and discouraging.

Spring came, and brought with it Major Armstrong, and health, and happiness to Eleanor. Sir Henry made as little difficulty now as he had appeared disposed to do at first. He came to the Rectory, and was as much enchanted with Eleanor as my mother had always felt sure he would be. She was looking particularly well, and *her* beauty, and my mother's sweetness, made his visit very pleasant; indeed no stranger could ever resist the charm of the latter, and I remember his telling Nelly one day that he should expect no small degree of perfection from the daughter of such a mother. My father liked him, and altogether, his visit left a pleasing impression of the family to whom Eleanor was about to belong.

Weddings were conducted much more quietly then than they are now. We did not gather our relations together, and make a great feast. There was no parade, no show, and no speeches, and I have no doubt, the bridegrooms of those days rejoiced in the absence of all three. Perhaps there was scarcely enough hospitality exercised, scarcely enough outward token that it was a matter of rejoicing.

It was the middle of August ere the day rose which was to be Eleanor's wedding-day. There was no attempt to make it bright and beautiful by decking the house with flowers; no one thought

of such a thing; there was not even a nosegay for the bride. She came down and breakfasted with us, just as if she were not going to be married. There was no party, the Major was at St. Leonard's; there was to be no breakfast. At a little after ten, Eleanor went up and dressed herself; she wore a beautifully worked robe of Indian muslin, a small white lace cap, and a damask silk shawl, with a white pattern on the faintest possible primrose-coloured ground. It formed, with its deep white fringe, a very handsome elegant-looking mantle. I suppose Agnes and I were considered her bridesmaids, and attired accordingly, but I have not the slightest recollection of what we wore, and am sure that our dress was considered of not the least importance. I imagine we had not even a new ribbon for the occasion. When the right time came, we walked quietly to church across the garden and the little paddock. There was no strewing of flowers before the bride, either going or returning; that pretty custom had been laid aside, and was not yet come up again. My father married them, and found himself equal to doing so alone; he did not require the assistance of one or two other clergymen to enable him to perform the short service, or to add to the dignity and impressiveness of the ceremony.

The extreme quietness of the whole affair in preventing the excitement attendant on bustle and company, had a tendency to preserve the

composure of all parties. I never was at a wedding about which there were fewer tears, though, I am sure, never did any daughter leave her father's house more regretted than Eleanor.

As soon as we re-entered the house, Mrs. Armstrong returned to her room to change her dress, and laying aside the delicate muslin, arrayed herself in a new cloth riding-habit, which, in spite of its being August, she intended to travel in. But it happened to be the fashion, and I do not know but that people sacrificed their comfort as readily to that demigod then as now. Eleanor might have been more cool and comfortable in a thin morning gown, but then she would not have been half so stylish, and I dare say she did not think about the heat. The carriage came round almost before she was dressed; a few hasty farewells, a few tender embraces, a burst of tears, and she was gone. But she and we were alike, full of hope for the future, only my father seemed to remember that there were such things as unhappy marriages. I thought my mother made extra exertions to be cheerful to cheer him, but a look of care and sadness haunted his face all the day.

I may not say much of Eleanor's future life; for it was not a happy one. She awoke from her dream, to find that her husband was wanting in just those qualities that she had been taught most to respect. He was not wilfully unkind to her, but his conduct had all the effect, if not of

unkindness, yet of cruel injury. By slow degrees she learnt to appreciate him at his real worth. Then came the struggle, half from wifely duty, half from pride, to conceal from the world in general, and my father and mother in particular, the knowledge of what he was ; to hide the bitterness of her disappointment in the secrecy of her own heart. Ere long, however, she was no longer able to keep up the poor pretence of concealment, but she never spoke of him slightly, even to us. I remember once when she was staying at Mitchelmore with two or three of her children, my mother observed of the eldest boy, that he was the image of his father, 'so like him in all his ways and attitudes, and even in the things he says.' I saw the exclamation of 'God forbid' pass like a shadow over Eleanor's face, but she did not give utterance to the thought of her heart. From Sir Henry Armstrong, and all her husband's family, she met with the greatest kindness ; no blame was ever cast upon her for the troubles which beset their after career. For awhile she drooped, then gathered up her courage, and bravely did her best for him and for their children. But many and many a time, when thinking of her life, of the wilfulness with which she had set her heart on marrying Major Armstrong, and of her blind idolatry of him, I have thought of good Bishop Andrews' prayer, and felt how proper it is to pray that 'we may inordi-

nately desire nothing earthly, may long for nothing but what we have, and may subdue all craving for any other life than that which is actually our own.'

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## CHAPTER III.

## THE DISTANT COUSINS.

'When Hope was like the sunbeam on the sea,  
With bright-winged thoughts to bear it company,  
And Love with flower and song.'

*Translation from Gerbel's Poems.*

BUT now, whilst I am recalling these old histories, shall I not set down some more especial recollections of my sister Agnes? Her quiet sympathizing face has been constantly before me whilst I have been writing Eleanor's story; and though her early footsteps seemed to travel through stiller ways, yet the strength and confidence which made them ways of peace and pleasantness, were not won or held without a trial. She was the listener and comforter; for natural unselfishness made her share the cares and troubles of others without an effort, and thus early exercise gave to her spirit a power to help and sustain, which her slight form and gentle countenance did not at all indicate. I think I had better tell her story very briefly, as it revealed itself



to me afterwards; but I must go back to the time when we had a visit from a certain distant cousin of my mother's, named Admiral Agar, and his daughter Maria, a fair, short young lady of six or seven-and-twenty, with a baby-shaped face, and curling golden hair. Admiral Agar was a very great favourite with us, and had often paid us a flying visit in former years, but never with any of his family, for his wife was an invalid, and their home was at Plymouth, where he and my mother had often met in 'the merry days when they were young.' Now he had not very long returned from a three years' command on the Mediterranean station; and having buried his wife at Valetta, left his son at Smyrna in command of a small sloop, the *Glory*, and married his eldest daughter since he reached England, he and the youngest were making excursions amongst their relations far and near. The Admiral had taken a house at Southsea, instead of returning to Plymouth, and there Miss Agar's wedding had taken place, and she exchanged the gaieties and varieties of a nautical life for a secluded and stationary home in Warwickshire, where her husband, who had been chaplain of the flag-ship, had obtained a perpetual curacy. A visit to Mitchelmore was no great undertaking from Southsea; but Eleanor and Agnes were rather alarmed, I remember, at the arrival of a young lady so much older than themselves, for Agnes was only then seventeen,

and she was sure that Miss Agar would never take any notice of her, even if she did of Eleanor. I smile to think how different it all was from their expectations. It would have been difficult for anyone to resist the good-will and wish to please with which Maria Agar seemed possessed. She did not look at all older than Eleanor or Agnes, and did not appear to feel herself so; and the perpetual smile which showed to advantage the white, regular teeth, which were her only decided beauty, must have made everyone set her down as the most good-tempered person in the world. As for Admiral Agar, his kind and cordial manner lifted us over the interval of years at once, and took up our intercourse just where it had left off. It was clear to me before the visit was nearly over that Maria had taken a great fancy to Agnes. One afternoon, when the latter was missed, she was discovered to have been shut up in Maria's room, and she showed us, in her pleased and quiet manner, a pretty little Maltese ring, which she said 'dear Maria had been so very kind as to give her.' Maria was a great talker, and her intercourse with society had given her a freedom of manner and expression which to us were quite startling; and even in my presence she sometimes told stories of her sister Catharine which astonished us more than all the rest. I have thought since how wrong and unsisterly it was in her to tell them; and I believe that Elea-

nor's quick sense saw and felt it then, but Agnes perhaps was a little flattered and blinded by being elevated into the confidential friend of a young lady so much older than herself, and she was very earnest in the defence of Maria when Eleanor one day expressed a doubt of her real good-nature. All the after consequences of the former's preference for Agnes no human being could have foreseen or guessed; even the one which followed immediately took us quite by surprise. Admiral Agar entreated my mother to allow Agnes to return with them to Southsea for a little change of air. 'She does not look as blooming as Eleanor,' he said, 'and I will engage to take the greatest care of her, and to send her back in a few weeks with a bright colour in those white cheeks of hers.'

Maria urgently enforced the request; and though my dear mother could not then, or afterwards, bring herself to part with any of us without an effort, yet, as Agnes was not in truth very strong, and the sea air might do her good, and as she was herself very much pleased with the invitation, it was soon settled that she was to go.

Poor Agnes, how her heart failed her before she started on this the first visit that she had ever made alone! And what a tearful face it was that looked back out of the window of the post-chaise to wish us all one more good-bye as we stood upon the door-step that bright August morning.

But the first thoughts in this case were the

truest, for it was soon clear that Agnes's days were passing as happily as could be in the new world to which she was introduced. She wrote long crossed letters to Eleanor, which were duly read aloud at breakfast; but beyond the facts that it was all very pleasant, that everybody was very kind, that they were *all* going on such a day to the Isle of Wight, and another day somewhere else, and so on, I was too young and unreflecting to draw any conclusions from them. The 'all' seemed always to include a Captain Lorton, who appeared to be considered as part of the family; and generally a Miss Delavalle, who we understood to be a near neighbour. And after a time there was another addition to their party in Admiral Agar's son, Herbert, whose sloop, the *Glory*, Maria had told us might possibly come in whilst Agnes was at Southsea. Agnes, in her shyness, had, I believe, secretly wished that it might not; but she had written since of the anxious look-out for the vessel as if she shared it, for she was seeing things now through Agar eyes, and they did not look the same as they had done at Mitchelmore. After Captain Agar's return Agnes's letters became very 'short and far between.' She 'had only time to write a few lines, as they were just going off on some excursion, and should not return till late,' &c., and Captain Agar had been so kind as to give her a drawing lesson yesterday when it was wet, and they were

prevented going somewhere else, and so on; but 'Captain Agar' changed into 'Cousin Herbert' now and then towards the last; and, doubtless, if I had then been given to reflection, I should have perceived even in those brief letters the indications of that 'magic dream' which must in this world, sooner or later, have so sad a waking. What my father and mother thought I know not, but about a fortnight after Captain Agar's arrival, my mother wrote to say that as Agnes had been absent four weeks, she must now be thinking of home again; and it was only after a most kind and urgent letter from the Admiral, seconded by Maria, that she consented that the visit should be extended for one fortnight more. But with all my dear mother's indulgence, that fortnight would surely not have been granted had she suspected the evil influence to which Agnes was exposed. I say *evil* influence, for truly I cannot call Maria's anything less; and though she was but the instrument in inflicting the discipline that was needed to produce a higher good than any earthly dream, yet, when we came by slow degrees to understand, as time laid them bare, the low and selfish motives on which she acted, we could not condemn them entirely without resentment. Now that all these emotions of other years have faded into the past, I can write of them, and all their causes and consequences, I trust, with gentleness and justice, and I can see

how much was to be said in Maria's excuse. Left very much unguided by an invalid mother in their childhood, she and her sister could not escape when they were grown up the influence of the society in which they lived and moved. They were soon deep in the flirtations and gaieties of a sea-port town, and the Admiral's good-natured sociability, to say nothing of Catharine's beauty, no doubt made their home a very pleasant one. Maria's flattering and fearless manner was the result, I imagine, of a constant effort to make up in agreeableness what she wanted in good looks; and Agnes thought, from many a confidence on the subject in after years, that she was justified in believing that with one person at least the attraction of manner had carried the day. Captain Lorton's intimacy with them had begun at that time. He was a very pleasant, but a very extravagant man, whom the Admiral would by no means have liked for a son-in-law; and when his appointment carried him and his family abroad, he could not have been sorry to see the intercourse broken off, unsuspecting as he was of the strong hold that Captain Lorton had acquired over Maria's feelings. Whether the latter underwent no fluctuation during her residence at Malta, Athens, or Corfu, is more than I can say, but when she returned home, Captain Lorton was in the flag-ship at Portsmouth, and the old intimacy was resumed immediately. Even unsuspecting

Agnes could see clearly enough that there was a constant effort on Maria's part, not at all seconded by her father, to secure Captain Lorton's attendance on all their expeditions; and her brother's return, so far from hindering, was an additional excuse for doing so, as, I believe, Agnes herself had been before. For Maria was not likely to fear any rivalry from one so very young, and shy, and self-distrustful as Agnes; and in her care for self, and recklessness for others, and perhaps partly from mere idleness of spirit, she had, as she thought, effectually pre-occupied her fancy. Long before the arrival of Captain Agar, she had made him the constant subject of conversation to Agnes. How handsome he was, how good-natured, how captivating, how certain to be charmed with his pretty cousin, and how jealous it would make Miss Delavalle, &c. Agnes thought Maria a most amiable and affectionate sister, and her humility made her instinctively disbelieve the flattery; but when, after his return, various pretty things that he had said of her were repeated, and perhaps exaggerated, with assurances that 'poor Augusta Delavalle had not a chance, for that she had won his heart completely,' it became a slow poison which even she, free as she was from vanity, and the blinding love of admiration, could not entirely resist. And Captain Agar, in spite of what seemed to the unpractised eyes of Agnes a considerable flirtation with Miss Dela-

valle, *was* very agreeable. His manner was so perfectly open. The 'Miss Lisle' of the first day or two's acquaintance was soon exchanged for 'Cousin Agnes;' and I can understand now how his frank bright spirit must have carried hers along with it from the beginning in all that he said and all that he did.

But I must tell my story faster. Agnes must come home. No more excursions, no more evening walks, no more drawing on the rainy mornings. The happy days must end. Agnes must come home. Admiral Agar was to take her by coach as far as Wellsbury, where my father went to meet her, and she took leave of Maria and Captain Agar at Southsea, the former's adieux being all that was affectionate, and those of the latter accompanied by a very needlessly earnest 'don't forget me.'



## CHAPTER IV.

## HOME CHANGES.

'Affliction then is ours;  
We are the trees, whom shaking fastens more.'

*George Herbert.*

AGNES came home, and if there were tears in her eyes when she left Southsea, they were dried up long before she reached Mitchelmore, for I remember well the happy face that she brought home to us, so different from the sad one that she had taken away. We were all struck with the change. It was not only that the complexion was brighter, but there seemed a glow of happy light in those soft eyes, a spirit and a life in the whole sweet countenance, which comes before me now as freshly as it did that evening. The Admiral had fulfilled his promise as to the pale cheeks. Never have I seen since a complexion which I thought so beautiful as that of my dear sister Agnes. So delicately fair, and yet, instead of the blue-pink tints which usually accompany a fair complexion, the colouring, a hue, a pure suffusion, of the brightest carnation, varying in degree, but only deepening into greater loveliness.

My dear mother knew best how to listen and how to lead on from one little chapter to the

other of the history of the visit ; and it needed clasped hands, and all the warmest words Agnes could think of, to express her enjoyment of it, and her sense of the Admiral's and Maria's kindness. I remember how pleasant it was to listen to the conversation as Agnes sat close to the open window in the dressing-room, the fair outline of her head shown out by the starry twilight of the soft September night, whilst her face was sometimes turned in light and smiles towards us, and sometimes hidden in the shadow of the outer darkness. Captain Agar's name came over very often, as well as Captain Lorton's, but my mother's request for a particular description of the former, whom she had never seen since he was a child, did not elicit anything very interesting or graphic.

'And Captain Lorton,' said my mother, 'is paying his addresses to Maria, I suppose, if they are not already engaged. Ah, we must remember that you are in Maria's confidence, so Agnes dear, I do not wish you to repeat anything that you think she would not say to us herself. I hope that Captain Lorton seemed to you a good and amiable man.'

Agnes hesitated. No doubt it crossed her mind at that moment how much that Maria had said to her could not be repeated, although Captain Lorton was not the subject, and perhaps it

puzzled her to express her opinion of *him*. The simple truth, however, came out.

'Mamma, I don't think that I did so very much like Captain Lorton, but I do not know why, for Maria praised him highly, and I am sure that he was very good-natured to me.'

How soon, in spite of this and other conversations, the Southsea concerns must have seemed to Agnes to die away after her return! The life there was not the life at Mitchelmore. She was at home again. The water-parties, the Isle of Wight, the vessels that came into harbour, or were going out, all that had charmed and occupied her there, soon ceased to be talked of in the family circle like a pleasant chapter that had been read and closed. And Agnes fell into her home life again, only with a brighter spirit, and with a cheerful and happy heart. Her dreams were of Southsea, yet even to Eleanor those dreams were not then, I believe, confessed, for *her* sad unsmiling manner threw Agnes back into her character of soother and listener, and doubtless made her fear lest her own happier feelings should seem selfish. Had she endeavoured to forget her visit and its charms, Maria's letters would have made it impossible. Long, crossed, neatly-written epistles, full of the most minute facts as to their daily proceedings since she left them, and the first containing very warm expressions of her own and 'Herbert's' regret at her departure. Agnes had

brought home with her a letter from the Admiral to my mother, full of sorrow at parting with his 'youngest daughter,' as he called her, so, as Maria said, 'we all knew his mind on the subject.' We, or at least I, did not hear the whole of Maria's letters. Agnes stopped very short once, I remember, at a sentence beginning with Captain Lorton, and I often saw her cheek flushing as she read on to herself. We thought they all seemed to be very gay, for there was a great deal about dances, and pic-nics, and Captain This, and Admiral That, which we did hear; and a few weeks after Agnes left Southsea, Maria announced that they were going into Warwickshire to pay their first visit to her sister Catharine and her husband. 'The journey,' she said, 'was a lucky thing for Herbert, for he had voted Southsea lately the most wearisome place in the world, and she should not have been surprised if he had absconded altogether, and been found wandering disconsolately about somewhere near Mitchelmore.'

I dare say the joke was of Maria's invention, but if Captain Agar waited for a regular invitation to the Rectory, he was not likely to appear there, for none was sent. When Agnes had finished reading her letter my mother said quietly, 'I hope we shall have the pleasure of seeing Captain Agar some day, but the Admiral, in his letter to me, mentioned his having good expectations of being employed again before very long.'

These 'good expectations' proved less delusive than hopes of promotion often are. Early in the spring Captain Agar was appointed to the *Star*, which was to proceed immediately to the North American station. The Admiral announced the fact in a letter to my mother, and though Agnes looked a little grave and sad, she heard it without any outward emotion.

But, indeed, we were all that winter so full of dear Eleanor's fears, and hopes, and deep anxieties, that I am sure any thought of self was far from Agnes's generous heart. Into her ear was poured the daily history of doubt, of conflict, of unchanging affection, and sometimes of despair; and as the sisters paced up and down, up and down the gravel walk beside the wood, till the chilling sunset of the cold, short days, warned them of the coming darkness, Agnes's patient face frequently wore a look of greater care even than Eleanor's. She *suffered* for her sister. The struggling spirit laid its burden upon the gently-enduring one, and was comforted.

The winter brought changes at Southsea, though not that which Agnes had expected. Maria's engagement to Captain Lorton must surely, she thought, take place before long, yet the news came not. The visit to Catharine had been followed by a tour in Wales, and Maria's letters became much less frequent. Miss Delavalle lost her father, but was left well provided

for, and went off with her four hundred a year to live with a married sister at Devonport, near Plymouth; and the next thing that we heard of Captain Lorton was, that he had left Portsmouth, and moved into the flag-ship at the former port, so there seemed an end of hopes and manœuvres concerning him. I say *seemed*, for when an infatuated feeling, like Maria's, is cherished and pursued, in spite of reason, in spite of self-respect, in spite of filial obedience and Christian duty, its tenacity does not easily yield to circumstances, although it may for a time appear to do so. Agnes knew, I believe, the very day that the 'Star' sailed from Spithead. She made an observation about the high March wind, one day, when we were out walking, which showed us where her thoughts had been; and I recollect some messages of farewell transmitted by Maria from Captain Agar. They were read through by Agnes in a quick low voice, and considered probably by my father and mother as the natural expression of his kind and courteous feeling towards his fair young cousin. And *perhaps*, as he gave them, they meant no more.

There were entreaties both from Admiral Agar and Maria, that Agnes might be allowed to come and pay them another visit this summer, and Maria urged it the more because, she said, their continuing at Southsea was very uncertain. Her father might not care to remain there much longer, and

perhaps they should not again be within such an easy distance of Mitchelmore. But if Agnes had herself been willing to leave Eleanor before the separation which must so shortly happen, the latter's piteous face when it was suggested would have made her lay aside the inclination. It was not to be thought of. My mother proposed instead that Maria and her father should spend some days with us; and in July they came, and stayed a week, and a very dull one I suspect it was to Maria. She had not much taste for seclusion and hay-cocks, and though her adieux were all that was amiable, I have a strong impression that the sitting under trees, or wandering about our solitary lanes with Agnes, had been but insipid enjoyment to her energetic spirit. She was certainly never disposed to repeat her visit, and I think she was much less empressé in her general good-nature and obligingness, so of course we did not feel it to have been so pleasant a one as the first. To Agnes, however, her manner was still caressing, and the former clung to her evidently with warm and grateful interest. No doubt many confidences were made on the subject of Captain Lorton, but how much Captain Agar was talked of I cannot tell. The Admiral often mentioned him when he and Agnes were talking over the last year's Southsea exploits. It was an animating subject to her, and it was pleasant to watch her bright smile, and open, trusting look,

as they touched upon the little incidents of that happy time. He made much of Agnes, and I think my dear mother was pleased to see that his good-will was won for her child, even if Maria's hasty friendship proved too hot to hold. They were going, after their visit to us, to wander about the world a little, for the Admiral had let his house at Southsea for three months, and part of that was to be spent in visiting some old friends at Plymouth.

But how tediously I am telling my story! Of course the design which, I believe, Maria had already formed of removing into Devonshire, was accomplished, as any other would have been on which she set her mind, for Admiral Agar could never long resist the wishes of his children. He had settled at Southsea to please one daughter, and he now left it to please the other; and Maria again found herself in the constant society of one in whose attachment to herself she persisted in believing, and whose hold over her feelings she would not endeavour to shake off.

It may be that in the conversations at Mitchelmore, Agnes, with her clear sense and upright judgment, had been unable to approve and sympathize on this subject as she would have wished to do, but there was a very decided change in Maria's letters after that time: they were short and rare. Little more than the slight mention of places and people seen in their visitings, with a



string of careless inquiries at the end for every one at Mitchelmore, and 'kind love and remembrances to them all, of course.' One of them contained this sentence, which, young as I was, and imperfectly as I then comprehended all that had gone before, made my cheeks flush when Agnes gave me the letter to read. 'I hope you will forthwith discard my unworthy brother from any place in your good graces. Captain Lorton tells me that he hears from a friend of his in the Star, that he has been flirting tremendously with the young ladies of Halifax in general, and a certain very handsome Miss Browning in particular. Augusta Delavalle is in despair, as well she may, and I live in the dreadful expectation, every day, of hearing of the final engagement. Don't take it to heart more than you can help!'

## CHAPTER V.

## STRAIGHT AND CROOKED.

'Grief will be joy, if on its edge  
Fall soft the holiest ray;  
Joy will be grief, if no faint pledge  
Be there of heavenly day.'

*Lyra Innocentium.*

POOR Agnes, how gently and submissively she bowed beneath the arrow that struck her home! She was like a bird in the hands of a fowler, powerless to strive, but patient to suffer. Eleanor was gone, and she was endeavouring to reconcile herself with cheerfulness to the painful blank occasioned by her marriage. We were naturally thrown much more together, and by degrees a fuller confidence than had existed before sprang up between us. A very ample place in my imagination had been occupied by my elder sisters, especially since they had grown up. I made to myself a romance of everything that happened to them, and with warm curiosity I now turned over the leaves of that Southsea chapter whenever I could entice Agnes to indulge me with a peep. She was not naturally reserved, but still it was only by little and little, and by putting together my own conclusions from various cir-

cumstances, that I arrived at the whole truth; and even then, how imperfectly I at that time understood how deeply painful is the chilling of a warm hope in the heart, and how hard the secret effort to bear that 'envenomed smart' with courage.

Maria's conduct puzzled me more than anything? Why had she behaved so treacherously to Agnes? Was it merely the careless caprice of a cold and selfish heart, or were there any deeper motives? I speculated on this subject with such eager interest, and asked Agnes so many questions, that once or twice she checked me with her quiet smile, and said that I was 'such a suspicious little ferret, that I could not be satisfied without turning everything inside out; but, after all, it was very natural that Maria's interest in her should cool, and the only surprise was, that it should have been so warm at first.' This was all very well for her humility, but without at all intending it, she gave me a much truer key to the mystery. Maria, it seemed, had confided to her, that when her marriage with Captain Lorton took place—of which event she never doubted—they should live with Admiral Agar. Captain Lorton's circumstances were not good—indeed he was much embarrassed—and she could not think, she said, of 'leaving dear papa.' Captain Agar had nothing but his profession independent of his her, and it could not fail to strike so worldly-

wise a mind as Maria's, that his marrying a cousin Agnes Lisle with nothing, was much more likely to interfere with her schemes, than his selecting an Augusta Delavalle with her nice little independence of four hundred a year. This bright idea of mine I did not choose to communicate to Agnes, but I did not the less believe then, as I believe now, that it was the true explanation of Maria's crooked and selfish conduct, strengthened afterwards by the additional fear lest this 'little independence,' so very desirable for her brother, should be an irresistible temptation to one who needed it more.

After a time, having arranged it all completely in my own mind, and expended an ample amount of secret condemnation upon Maria, Agnes and I ceased to discuss the subject. We took long walks together almost every day, and talked of the poor whom we went to visit, or of the books that we were reading together, and often, of course, of Eleanor. Agnes said that she wished to be very industrious that winter, and she pleased my dear mother very much, I am sure, by her plans for our studying, and my father by her constant attendance and painstaking at the school. And in those days school teaching was not so much a fashion for young ladies as it is now. And her wise efforts were not in vain. I look back with lively interest to those many quiet months of regular employment. We read Italian

together, and when I read it even now, I hear in it the soft tones of that sweet, gentle voice, unconsciously perhaps, subdued to pathos by the wounded spirit within. And the attention to the school soon became no effort, but a pleasure. The home-trials and circumstances of the children whom we taught, we learnt to understand and enter into ; and if they often took up much of our time, they at least occupied our thoughts in no selfish or unwholesome way. And how well Agnes filled the place of young lady of the house ! So pleasant and obliging to our visitors, and so useful to my mother by her considerate help in the many small occupations of daily life. I am sure it must have made her happy to feel how much she was valued at home ; and her tranquil, smiling countenance, and recovered playfulness of manner, showed that it did. Not that Southsea ceased to be remembered. That could not be. There remained deep within the impression, I can well believe, of one of those looks of true affection which, as has been well said, ' can *never* be forgotten by the heart to which they have been addressed.' But though in the natural strength of deep and simple feeling there sometimes arose the thought that she and Captain Agar *must* meet again, her abiding conviction was that it would not be. Whether the flirtation at Halifax had any foundation or not, Agnes knew that she was meant to understand that Captain Agar had quite forgotten

her. She tried hard to believe that Maria had good and kind reasons for telling her this, and submitted. Even if she could have doubted the change in *his* regard, on Maria's testimony, the change in the latter's was undeniable. She almost ceased to write, and we were more indebted to the Admiral's occasional letters to my mother than to her, for our knowledge of their goings on.

In the summer the Admiral paid us a flying visit, but Maria, on the plea of the length of the journey, declined to accompany him. He spoke of her as very well and very gay, and told Agnes that they still saw a great deal of her old friend, Captain Lorton, but he was afraid that he was just as extravagant as ever, and he rather suspected him of a design to set himself straight by making up to Miss Delavalle and her twelve thousand pounds. Did Maria think so, Agnes wondered? Oh, what a blow for her if the Admiral should prove less blind than she was, and his idea a correct one! But in a note from Maria some weeks afterwards, there was a sentence about the possibility of the *Star* being sent home in the spring, and of her 'friend Augusta's eyes looking splendidly bright at the prospect of *somebody's* return.'

If Agnes's heart beat a little faster as she read the passage, it was, I am sure, speedily stilled again. What now to her was the return of that ship whose course her thoughts, in spite of herself, had so long followed? It could be no more

a star of hope to her. Captain Agar had never come to Mitchelmore, and Maria did not intend that they should meet elsewhere. Whatever her motives were, *that* conclusion could not be avoided. The little that was said, and the much that was unsaid in those scanty and altered letters, proved it. They should not meet again; and Agnes resolutely turned her thoughts from Plymouth and its interests, and deeply reproached herself for the vanity of heart which needed such correction.

The Star came home; *when*, I knew not, but Agnes's eyes had long ago learnt to glance at the shipping news in our weekly paper. And about three or four weeks afterwards, but not sooner, a letter from Maria spoke of her brother Herbert as again amongst them, and 'devoting himself, as in duty bound, to Augusta Delavalle, who was now paying her a long visit, and whose constancy, she was happy to say, promised to be properly rewarded at last.'

It was the final blow; and as Agnes read it out in her low, calm voice, at breakfast-time, my spirit rose against the faithless heart whose fealty, counter-influence and long absence could thus destroy. Yet that evening, when we were sitting together in silence under our chestnut tree, resting from a walk to St. Leonard's, and I saw the slow tears rolling quietly down Agnes's cheeks as she re-read Maria's letter, I could not resist ex-

claiming, while I threw my arm round her neck, 'Oh Agnes, I don't believe it. Captain Agar cannot have forgotten you. He told you that he *never* would, and you would like to see him again so *very* much!'

'*Once*,' May dear, she answered gently, 'once I should, but not now. Now it will be better not.'

So the summer passed on, and it seemed a longer time than usual since we had heard or seen anything of Admiral Agar, when my mother, one morning, received a few hurried lines from him, written from London, and saying that he was there on business for a day or two, but hoped to get away the next morning, and to appear at Mitchelmore in the course of the afternoon, and beg for a night's lodging. His plans had been uncertain, so he had not been able to write before, but we were not to think about him till we saw him.

It was, I remember, one of those serene, transparent days in September, the most unspeakably beautiful, to my thinking, of all the changing year, and after our five o'clock dinner—the Admiral not having made his appearance—Agnes and I walked up Warren Lane to a favourite spot of ours called Silver Dell, (from the white stems of the ash-trees that were grouped there) and sat some time in the fresh, delicious stillness, whilst the golden sunlight streamed between the shadows, and danced upon the grass and leaves. A bright beam rested upon Agnes's uncovered head, and I



likened it, in my fancy, to a kind of rewarding smile for her happy way of living and working for others, so different from the slack hands and sour looks with which some of us take up even the burdens of our own household. But it was a passing smile. The glow faded, vanished—the dell became dark with shadow, and Agnes suggested that the dew would be falling, and we had better walk home again. So we were tying on our bonnets, and I was just stepping up the bank, and out from between the ash-trees into the lane, when who should I see within a few yards of me but Admiral Agar, not alone, but with another gentleman walking up the lane beside him. I ran forward thoughtlessly to meet the Admiral, calling back to Agnes to tell her of his appearance, but I do not think she heard or understood my sudden exclamation. In a minute I was shaking hands with Captain Agar, and had answered the Admiral's instant question, 'But where is Agnes?' by turning with them towards the dell, when she sprang lightly—her bonnet in her hand—from the grassy bank into the narrow lane, and met us face to face. The sudden, hasty action, was an excuse for the deep blush, and graceful, timid air, with which she gave her hand even to the Admiral; and I could not wonder that one instant's glance at the 'Cousin Herbert' of other days was all that she had courage for. But as we walked back down the lane together to

the cottage where they had left my mother, who had accompanied them so far, there were plenty of questions to be asked and answered. Captain Agar, it seemed, had joined his father in London unexpectedly, and had suddenly resolved, as the latter was going to Mitchelmore, to take his chance of a welcome there himself—Maria not very well—suffering from tooth-ache—thinking of a visit to Catharine—country very sweet and pleasant after London—beautiful evening, &c. I was not in much danger of being left behind with Captain Agar, though I had rather dreaded it, for the lane was not wide enough for four people to walk abreast, but somehow we managed, in an irregular fashion, to keep together, and I had an excellent opportunity of making acquaintance with his pleasant, handsome face, before we reached the cottage where my mother joined us. Then she and the Admiral walked together, and we three must get on as we could; and at first it seemed not very well, for there was rather an awkward silence, and I thought it somewhat dull. But a lovely wreath of bryony in the hedge caught my eye, and as I turned away to gather it, I heard Captain Agar say in his deep, sweet voice, ‘And so, Cousin Agnes, I am told that you have quite forgotten me.’

The answer I did not hear. It took me some time to disentangle the delicate end of my bryony wreath from the brambles to which it clung, and

my companions had gained upon me so much, that I made no attempt to overtake them, but amused myself with collecting a wild flower nose-gay of scabions and snap-dragon, till they had crossed the road, and entered our own sycamore-shaded lane, and then, as I ran forward, I heard Captain Agar say, 'I suppose Maria has written you word of Lorton's engagement to Miss Delavalle?'

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Admiral Agar left us the next day as he intended, but did not take his son with him. It was his first visit to Mitchelmore, and of course he must stay and make farther acquaintance with it. I thought that he and Agnes were on very pleasant terms again after that walk down Warren Lane; but there was another, some days afterwards, to Silver Dell, which settled the question of her life and his for ever, and filled her heart with grateful, and, as she believed, quite undeserved happiness.

In general a selfish object, steadfastly pursued, gains its own worldly and selfish end. The grapes that have been toiled for are gathered, and found bitter to the taste. But Maria Agar's case was an exception. She had toiled in vain; all her crooked policy, from first to last, entirely failed; and for once the patient right that did not strive for itself, gained the day against the active

and determined wrong. But Maria smiled, I am sure, through it all, and went off to pay a long visit to Catharine, where her assiduous spirit, always active for *self*, found employment in winning the affections of a clergyman, a rather elderly widower, with an excellent living in Shropshire. Her marriage took place almost immediately, and I have always understood that she made a most superior stepmother to his eleven children; but whether they and he made *her* life a pleasant one, there is some reason to doubt.

After an engagement of only a twelvemonth, Agnes, found, and made, a happy home in her father-in-law's house. Time brought its troubles and cares, many and deep to her, but they were all lightened by her husband's affection, and by the submissive will and patient confidence which had won their strength from no earthly source.

## CHAPTER VI.

## THE GREAT FROST.

'The keener tempests rise ; and fuming down  
From all the livid east, or piercing north,  
Thick clouds ascend ; in whose capacious womb  
A vapoury deluge lies to snow congeal'd,  
Heavy they rolled their fleecy world along,  
And the sky saddens with the gathered storm.'

*Winter. Thomson's Seasons.*

1813, three and forty years ago ! What a period ! It almost seems impossible that so many years should have passed since then. Three-and-forty years must I look back to the days of which I am about to speak.

It was in August, 1812, that Eleanor was married ; and it was in October, 1813, that her first child was born. She and her husband were then living at Canterbury. She wrote to my father and mother to request them to be the sponsors for her infant, and begged that they and Agnes would come and pay her a visit. She said she was very sorry that she could not include me, but the house was extremely small, and the closet she destined for Agnes would, by no manner of means, hold two. My dear mother demurred a little, in spite of her great desire to see Eleanor and Eleanor's baby, to

leaving me behind, not that there was any difficulty beyond what our feelings made, for I could easily have been sent to New Court, where my uncle and aunt, Gen. Sir William and Lady Lisle, were then living, having returned to England the year after the death of poor Charles. But I was still, though between sixteen and seventeen, treated somewhat like a child, and being the youngest, and very short and slight, no one seemed to remember that I was actually grown up. I was still 'May' with everybody, excepting that my father sometimes called me 'his little girl,' and 'little white chicken,' still enjoyed some of the petting and caressing usually bestowed only on the first years of existence, was still sometimes placed on my father's knee, and was always considered incapable of doing many things which Agnes and Eleanor had been allowed to do long ere my age.

Let me endeavour to set myself before the reader, to recall for a moment what I was in early youth. I was not five feet in height, and, though tolerably round and plump, was so slightly made, that I scarcely looked above half grown. I had a very white skin, and pale pink cheeks, only getting a bright colour when excited. A soft, small face, very light brown hair, eyes of a deep grey, of a somewhat roundish shape, and long dark eye-lashes. I do not know that there was any great beauty. But I had beauty enough to be called very pretty, though few, I imagine, would have

thought me as handsome as either Eleanor or Agnes. As well as I can recollect, I should say that I looked smooth, fresh, and healthy, with a kind of childishness about the formation of the mouth and chin, and in the expression of the eyes. I do not remember considering myself pretty, but then how could I, with two such strikingly lovely sisters?

I had never been separated from my parents a single week, and when first the idea of my going to New Court was started, it seemed to me quite impossible I should do it. My dear mother, too, was afraid that I should be unhappy, when I got there, and found myself all alone in the world, and proposed that my father and Agnes should go to Eleanor, and that she and I should stay together at Mitchelmore. But my father decided otherwise; he said, 'I must not be made a baby of all my life; that it would do me good to go to New Court, and have to exert myself, and behave like a grown-up young lady; that it was time I should leave off hanging upon my mother, and should learn to take myself a little more into my own guidance.' And so my uncle and aunt were written to, and I was to go.

Sir William and Lady Lisle lived in style, and kept a good deal of company, and he was a grand and dignified old man, with various peculiarities and fancies it did not do to run up against, and as I had never been out, it was no wonder my mother felt anxious about me.

‘The society at New Court will be quite a little world for you,’ she said. ‘I hope you will not be frightened. You must play when you are asked. I should like you to practise a little of a morning if you can, without its being disagreeable to your uncle and aunt. And do not slip in and out of the rooms, as if you were ashamed of yourself; and oh, my love, mind you do not slam the swing-door, the General cannot bear it. You will find them very kind to you, I am quite sure;’ but there was a slight shade of anxiety in her tone. ‘And, May, I shall send Harriet with you. Your aunt’s maid, would, I dare say, be attentive; but in that great house, and with only strange servants, you will be more comfortable with some one that you know and are used to.’

It was towards the end of November that my father and I set off on our journey, and when the moment of separation arrived, I cried as if I had been going to Siberia, or to some equally distant and inhospitable country; and my mother and Agnes caught the infection of my tears. We took our own carriage and horses the first stage, and afterwards posted. It was a long day’s journey from Mitchelmore to New Court, but by starting early in the morning, it could just be done in one day. Everything was new to me; even the dining at an inn was amusing from its novelty. And as the chaise rattled along, up hill and down, my father gave me topographical and biographical



sketches of the gentlemen's seats that we passed, or could see from the carriage windows. We had both, however, grown weary and silent, long ere we reached our journey's end. I had been looking dreamily at the moon and stars for above an hour, when the vehicle stopped at the great gate of the park. It might have been a turn-pike-gate for anything I could see, but my father, who had a quick eye for all alterations at New Court, leant out and exclaimed, 'So the General has had the old shields fresh gilded. Look that side, amongst the trees, May, and you will soon see the lights from the house.' I had never been to New Court since I could remember, but the place was traditionally dear to me, to my fancy full of romance and interest, and I thought of how many generations of Lisles had trod its halls, of sad Mistress Eveline, and her grim, puritanical father.

Dazzled by the light, and confused by my journey, I scarcely saw anything around me for the first few minutes after we had entered the house; but gradually the mists cleared away, and I found I was in an oak-panelled room, rather low, but looking very warm and comfortable. The General and my father were standing talking together on the rug. There was a strong family likeness between them, but the expression of my uncle's face was the most authoritative, and his skin was burnt to a darker shade from his long

residence in India. Anyone could see that he had been used to rule others; something of his ex-governorship clung to his air and carriage, and to everything he either looked or said. His own servant, who had lived with him for many years, always addressed him as 'Your Excellency,' and, indeed, it scarcely seemed possible to speak to him by any meaner title.

It is not my purpose, however, to enter into a detailed account of the whole of my visit to New Court. By the time my father left me, which he did within the week, I had grown used to both uncle and aunt, had learnt my way about the place, and could send my love to my mother, and assure her I was very happy.

The first week in December they and Agnes set off on their longer journey to Canterbury, which they reached safely the following day. Oh, how little did we any of us foresee how long it would be before we should meet again, or what an altered heart I should bring back with me to my quiet village home!

My mother had told me that the society at New Court would be quite a little world for me, and I felt I was expected to come back a great deal the older and wiser for my visit; but truly I could not see where the temptations lurked that I was to resist, or the wisdom I was to gather. My uncle and aunt seemed to follow the example of everybody else, and to consider me too small

to be done anything to but petted. The General was especially kind, and invented a new name for me, long enough for two such little bodies, 'Lilliputia,' which he sometimes abbreviated into Lilly. I must mention here, as an instance of his great kindness, that he spared me a scolding which I believe he would have spared no one else. One unlucky day, in running hastily down to breakfast, I let the swing-door, which stood at the top of the staircase, fall, and when I heard what a frightful noise it made, slamming backwards and forwards, I no longer wondered so much at the General's particularity. It seemed to awaken all the echoes of the house, and I could even fancy that its vibrations had set some other swing-door in motion in some remote region. I stood half way down the stair-case, gazing and listening with a degree of terror, which quite prevented my having the presence of mind to rush up and stop it, my hands tightly clasped together, as if I were praying it to stop. I heard the General come out of the breakfast-room, and demand in an awful voice, 'who had dared to let that door slam?' and he advanced to the foot of the staircase to detect the criminal. I looked at him with a face which I am sure must have been comical from its expression of fear, for his relaxed from its severity when he saw mine, and with a smile, and in an altered accent, he continued, 'Come down, you little coward, and don't stand

trembling there, as if you thought I should kill you.' I came down at his bidding, and he laid his hand lightly on my head, and kissing me, said, 'I will forgive you this time, but never make such a noise again. Why don't you come through the key-holes? You are almost small enough.' Nothing disenchanta a young lady like *a mal adresse* of that sort.

Christinas came, and my visit was supposed to be drawing to a close. It had been pleasant, but less gay than I had expected, and during the whole of it the weather had been unusually severe for the season, a strong north-easterly wind having prevailed since the beginning of December. My aunt, who was delicate, scarcely ever left the fire-side, where she sat wrapt up in an Indian shawl, of what seemed to me almost incredible value. She, however, had two handsomer ones. The store she set by those rich mantles was very great, 'mantles fit for a queen,' she called them, and she touched them with a kind of admiring reverence, and gathered them round her with a proud dignified carefulness, which was very impressive. I think I acquired a little of her taste for such garments during my visit; the texture was so beautiful, and the colouring so rich. Owing to the cold, she fancied she could not go out, even in the carriage; no, not if she had been wrapped up in all three of her Indian shawls at once; so what exercise I got, I took alone, and

on foot. One afternoon I set out on my solitary walk as usual, I recollect it was on the 27th of December, and as I left the shelter of the house, I felt the wind to be more cutting than ever. I took a footpath that led across the park, noticing, as I walked, the hard, dry, desolate look of all around me, and thinking it was the blackest frost I had ever seen so early in the winter. I remember now the singular dreariness of the earth, and the wildness of the sky; the cruel wind came sweeping through a rent in the clouds, revealing the depth of the mass of vapour which hung above. I looked into the chasm it had burst; but not a speck of blue was visible, only fold beyond fold of iron-grey mist, interminable and impenetrable, which looked both dark and sullen. I turned in another direction, for the sake of walking away from the blast; and getting warm with the exercise, kept on until I had travelled some distance from the house. Before me lay the beautiful and rapid stream which ran through the park; on its opposite side rose a steep hanger of oaks, beneath whose banks I thought I should find it pleasant and sheltered, and under the cover of the protecting hill, should be able to return home, without having to battle again with the wind. A couple of very narrow planks, with an open hand-rail on one side, formed the bridge. As I set my foot on it, I noticed a gentlemen walking on the other side, apparently about to enter the

hanger by a winding path which led through it. He turned, watched me for a moment, and then went on into the wood. I saw he was a stranger, and was struck with his singularly gentleman-like, and even graceful air. When I got about half way across the bridge, I paused and looked back at the sky, its character had altered since I had studied it last. The wind seemed to have gained a kind of mastery over the clouds. To the east it was swept clear and bare, but in the west the ponderous masses of vapour reminded me of Milton's description of death—

‘ Black they stood as night,  
Fierce as ten furies, terrible as hell.’

Their serried ranks hung dark above the horizon, so low, that they seemed about to roll over the earth, and in no part was there hole or crevice through which a ray of the obscured sun could penetrate.

In the stream, though of considerable volume and rapidity, long arrows of ice were floating about. I was amusing myself with watching these, when I heard the before-mentioned stranger whistling for his dog, who in another instant sprang upon the bridge. He was a large Newfoundland; and in his impatience to rejoin his master, he rushed past, and all but plunged me into the water. I had hold of the rail, and fortunately it was strong enough to stand a good pull,

for I was nearly swept off the plank, and it was a minute or two before I could recover my footing; when I rose from my knees, I saw the stranger hastening to my assistance.

'I beg your pardon,' he said, taking off his hat; 'I never thought of the dog being so far behind. I hope you are not hurt.'

I was not hurt, but I was frightened, and clung trembling to the friendly rail to recover breath and composure.

'Pray allow me to assist you,' he continued, taking my passive hand, and leading me over, and I felt he was looking earnestly at me, perhaps with a desire of ascertaining whether I was any acquaintance of his. I was very shy, and hung down my head, and hardly thanked him. When we were on the other side, he called to his dog. 'Come here, Sir,' he said, 'and beg this lady's pardon,' and he raised his stick as if he intended to punish him for his rudeness.

'Oh, pray don't!' I exclaimed, looking up at him for the first time. 'It was not his fault;' and I stooped down and patted him.

'What a lucky dog he is, to be so rewarded instead of being punished,' he said. 'I hope you have not far to go.'

'Thank you, not far,' I answered. 'Only to the house, to New Court.'

'To New Court,' he replied, with a sudden brightening in his eyes. 'Oh! then perhaps it

is Miss Lisle that I have the honour of addressing.'

I bowed, and said I was staying with my uncle and aunt, and I did so wish that he would have told me who he was. But instead, he only answered, 'Then I shall hope to have the happiness of meeting you again;' and stepping backwards, he again took off his hat, and bowed as he turned away. I felt that when we had each travelled along our several paths a few paces, he paused, and stood for a second or two watching me, and so I could not look back at him, which I was just on the point of doing. Fortunately I had not turned my head, and he could not know how strong my desire to do so was. I love to recall him as I saw him then. He could not have been above one-and-twenty. I cannot recollect what colour his eyes were, I only know that they were darker than the clouds which hung over the horizon, and surely never were there eyes, or voice, or smile, which had the charm in them his had.

Are you, dear reader, fanciful about voices? I am very. Some seem to me to indicate hearts overflowing with feeling, and such a voice was Mr. Longuet's. Soft as any woman's, yet too deep to be effeminate. Ah! ere long, I learnt to think that to listen to its music for ever, was the one thing necessary for my happiness. As I walked back, I thought of nothing but him; I



longed to know who he was, and whether he would be at the ball to which I was going that night with my uncle and aunt. I thought it not improbable that he might be the very individual, he afterwards proved. Not above three miles from New Court, resided Lord and Lady Burg-hurst, the former of whom was a most intimate friend of my uncle's. The two properties joined, and the parks, indeed, ran into each other, like the pieces of a dissected map, and at Burg-hurst Place was the ball to which we were all going. I knew that their only son and only child, Mr. Longuet, was at home, and what could be more probable than that he was the hero I had met.

I always wondered at the friendship which subsisted so long between my uncle and Lord Burg-hurst, for, as far as I could make out, the latter had but little to recommend him to the regard of any sensible man. His temper was so violent, that people pleaded for it the excuse of partial insanity, and there was always some horrible or ridiculous story afloat in the neighbourhood of his eccentric passions. His understanding was narrow, and his pride nearly as outrageous as his temper. It is difficult now-a-days to believe in the length to which he carried his veneration for his own pedigree, for I believe he cared very little for the good blood of other people. If you were not a Longuet, you might nearly as well be Smith

or Jones ; nothing could save you from being immeasurably beneath him and his. I verily believe he only loved his son because he was his heir ; I am sure he only valued his wife because she bore his name. But let me pause ; perhaps personal feeling is embittering my pen. I must remember it is difficult for me to be just. With all the violence of his temper, there was something very pleasing in his address, very smooth and soft, and his voice had the same roundness which lent such a charm to his son's. Ah, could it be that the likeness extended farther, and that with him, too, those musical accents covered an insolent uncontrolled temper !

I shall never forget that evening. The excitement in which I dressed, the pleasure which the conviction that I was looking my very best gave me, and the delight with which I perceived that my uncle and aunt thought so too. It must be remembered I was very young, and it was my first ball, and that, in a general way, I did not think much about my appearance. Once again let me plead in excuse for all the folly I was guilty of, that I was very young—I might add, heedless and impulsive.

‘ Why, Lilly ! ’ my uncle said, ‘ you look like the queen of the fairies to-night ; where did you get those roses ? and who brought you the diamonds for your eyes ? Is it all genuine ? ’ And he rubbed his finger upon my cheek to satisfy himself that there was no rouge.

It was very kind of my uncle and aunt to take me to the ball, for they had accepted the invitation entirely on my account, and would both have preferred staying at home. Indeed it was a great effort for my aunt to make, but she was so wrapped up in her Jackal-skin cloak, that I do not think she could have felt the cold, bitter though it was. The General looked out of the window of the carriage as we went along, and commented on the peculiar darkness of the night. 'It is very odd,' he said, 'the moon is nearly at the full, and yet it is pitch dark;' and as we stopped at the door of Burghurst Place, he observed to the coachman, 'It is a black night, Thomas.'

'The blackest night, Your Excellency, I ever was out in. There is something, I'm a thinking, more than should be over head.'

But I had lost all interest in the weather, I had been busy in anxiously speculating on the chance that the handsome unknown might be Mr. Longuet. I might have solved my doubts by applying to my aunt; but I felt shy about naming my adventure. Did he mean by the happiness of meeting me again, the happiness of dancing with me? That was the question I asked myself, as I followed my uncle and aunt across a spacious hall, and up a wide staircase. A gentleman stood leaning, in a negligent attitude, against the upper part of the banisters. As we approached, he

came somewhat eagerly forward, and the next minute, my aunt turned to me, and said, 'My dear, here is Mr. Longuet begging to be introduced to you.'

'Not quite the first time we have met to-day,' he said; and in reply to the General's quick, 'Aye, indeed! how is that?' he gave him a brief account of the afternoon's incident. I was presented to Lord and Lady Burghurst, and then Mr. Longuet handed me to my place amongst the dancers.

'I almost feared,' he said, 'we should have had to begin before you were arrived. I had been waiting on the landing, in hopes of being the first applicant for the honour of your hand, for nearly half an hour.'

But I cannot write the history of our dances together, though I believe I could, with an effort, recall every syllable he uttered. He was the talker. I was too young and shy to say much, hardly knew, indeed, how to receive his pretty speeches, or how to meet the graceful courtesies of his manner, but I listened with the most perfect belief in everything he uttered. Balls were much sooner over then than they are now; by two o'clock the carriages were all come round; but when the guests prepared to depart, from one and all there arose a cry, that so thick a fog had spread itself over the earth, that to depart was unsafe, if not impossible. It was so thick, that

as the carriages stood in a row, from the one behind the lamps of the one in front could barely be seen. All the gentlemen went out in hopes of finding that, when beyond the buildings and shrubberies, it was not so dense. They came back, however, only to confirm the danger. Even on foot they had been unable to get on. They had grown bewildered, missed their way, knocked against the trees, straggled into plantations, and got entangled amongst the horses.

What was to be done? The frightened ladies clustered together; one energetically tied the strings of her cloak, and announced her intention of walking home; and another declared, that if they would only take the horses off the carriage, she could pass the night very well there. But my uncle and Lord Burghurst settled the matter. The ball had been a very large one, and many had come from a great distance; it was impossible for one house to find beds for a hundred and fifty people, and more, many more, including servants. And, whilst the young men were proposing that we should all return to the ball-room and dance away till the morning, the two seniors agreed that the party should be divided, and those for whom no accommodation could be found at Burghurst Place, should accompany us in our return to New Court. My uncle laughed to scorn the notion of danger—'What was to hurt us?' he asked, 'going at a foot's pace along

a capital road, with quiet horses, whose instinct would lead them back to their own stables.' He came up, therefore, and ordered my aunt and me to take our places in the carriage. Mr. Longuet had been hovering about us during all the confusion. Again and again had he gone out to examine the state of things, and returned to assure us, with the greatest animation, that it was quite impossible we should go. 'Never was fog,' he declared, 'so opportune.'

My uncle's orders, therefore, surprised him. 'My dear General,' he said, 'surely you cannot think of taking these ladies away; I assure you it is impossible to go home on such a night as this.'

But my uncle, having once made up his mind, was not a man to change it. I confess I was greatly frightened. I heard all around speaking of the risk and the danger; and, in the fog itself, there was something to me oppressive and awful. I could see it rolling in at the open hall door, making the very candles burn dim, whilst everyone declared they had never known anything like it. My aunt was quite as much alarmed as I was, but she knew the General's ways, and knew we must submit. Into the carriage we got, therefore, in silent obedience; and, as the General followed, Mr. Longuet exclaimed, 'At least if you will go, I shall go with you. You must travel a foot's pace, and I shall walk on in front, to see

that you keep the roads. Pray do not be frightened, Miss Lisle. I know the way well, and my lantern will serve as a guide to the horses !'

I was very much afraid that Sir William would be angry, and forbid his doing any such thing ; but it was my aunt who leant forward, and said, ' Oh, Mr. Longuet ! not on any account ; I cannot think of keeping you out such a night ; I dare say we shall do very well. Pray go in.' But the General pulled her back, and leaning his own head out instead, added, ' We are very much obliged to you ; your lantern will be of great use ;' then turning to his wife, he good-humouredly continued, ' He does not mind the fog ; he had much rather be out in the cold, than snug in his own room ; and it makes us feel quite safe and comfortable to know that he is in front, hey, Lilly.'

Three or four carriages followed ours, and most slowly did we progress, Mr. Longuet literally groping the way for us. Every now and then he came up to the carriage window to speak cheerfully, and say it was all right. Our coachman hollaed, from time to time, to those behind, his voice proving a better guide than the lamps, which could only burn feebly in such an atmosphere. Several times we had to stop altogether, while Mr. Longuet excused about to ascertain that we had not got amongst the trees. The General himself had to alight on one occasion, and assist

in recovering the road. In somewhere about an hour we had crossed the barrier between the two parks, and had gone thus far in safety. I had done nothing all along but look out and watch Mr. Longuet. Of him I could not see the faintest outline, but his light was dimly visible, now evidently held close to the ground to ascertain its nature, and then held up on this side, and on that to discover if the coast was clear. The carriage lamps revealed the hind-quarters of the horses, but no more; his lantern burnt a little a-head; suddenly, as I looked, it disappeared. The carriage stopped, the coachman called to those behind to pull up, there was a crash and a splash, and then a shout that we were close upon the water, and that Mr. Longuet had fallen into it. (As I have before said, the stream was deep, rapid, and wide, and to get out of it was not easy at any time; and, when it was impossible to see which way to turn, we all felt it must be a matter of great difficulty.) The General jumped out of the carriage, unheeding my poor aunt's anxious cry that he would only share the same fate himself. I begged to follow, but she seized my dress and checked me, and so I could only stand at the open door, straining my eyes in vain to pierce the mists that hid earth and water alike from view. Every faculty of my being was occupied with the horrible dread that Mr. Longuet would be drowned; but I remembered afterwards



how, during the interval of suspense, Lady Lisle kept calling to the servants, 'Don't let the General go near the water!' 'Take care of your master—stop him, stop him!' At last—it seemed at last, though I believe it was almost immediately—there was a rushing, dripping sound, and then, to the unspeakable relief of everyone, Mr. Longuet's voice, shouting to us, as well as his breathlessness would allow, not, upon any account, to move. I could fancy my uncle almost embracing him, so hearty was the accent in which he said, 'Longuet! thank God, I am right glad to see you again, my boy!'

'Thank you, thank you!' he hastily answered; 'but don't let the horses stir: a step forward is destruction!'

It was very true; somehow, we had passed the road, and got on the turf, close to the edge of a high bank, immediately below which ran the water before mentioned. Had it not been for him, horses and carriages would have been precipitated into it. Many minutes elapsed ere we could recover the right track, and it was not until we were all slowly proceeding homewards that Mr. Longuet again came to the window. My aunt anxiously inquired if he were hurt. 'One hand,' he said, 'seems a little cut, and I am wet through, but that is a trifle.' How I longed to add my voice to hers, but somehow I could not speak; something rose in my throat, and seemed

to choke me, and obliged me to keep what I felt to be a most unfeeling silence; I had not even the presence of mind to take the hand I dimly saw him hold out to me.

Ah, well! we reached New Court at last, and you may fancy what a hurrying and skurrying there was up-stairs and down, ere so many unexpected guests were stowed away. When we got into the lighted house, it was sad to see what a figure Mr. Longuet was. The water was still dripping slowly from him, and the blood from his wounded hands mingling with it, had stained his clothes, and even his brow, crimson, while his fine dark hair was all plastered down on his head. It was difficult to believe that he was not terribly hurt. I went up to him from the wish to express my sorrow, but he waved me impatiently away; I think he was vexed that I had not inquired before how he was, but I am sure it was not indifference which had kept me silent. I was so grieved at his manner, that I stood a moment looking at him with the tears flowing over my face, without being in the least aware that I was crying. The change in his countenance first recalled me to myself: 'Is it possible,' he said, softly, 'those tears can be for me? But there is no need; I am a horrid object, I daresay, but I am scarcely at all hurt; I am not fit to shake hands with you, that is the worst of it!' But I must wish you good-night, and get back to Burghurst as fast as I can.'

'Oh! you must not think of it!' I exclaimed.  
'Uncle, you will not let him.'

My uncle turned at my voice: 'Let him,' he repeated; 'I shall let him go nowhere but to bed. Come, off with you, Sir; I will send my servant to see to your hands, and you shall have something hot in a minute.'

So Mr. Longuet disappeared, and, happily, was not the worse for his accident, that is, as far as the water was concerned, for both his hands proved to be cut, and one very badly. However, even the worst was not beyond the power of that invaluable 'grandmother's salve' to heal; for we could not have got a doctor had it been a case of life and death. I always wondered how it was that my aunt escaped catching cold that night, but she did, although the window or the door of the carriage had been constantly opened. I suppose the excitement of fear kept her warm. By the time we were all in our respective rooms, it was nearly five o'clock in the morning; and it was long after six ere I went to sleep. It seemed to me, when I awoke, that I had been asleep for some hours; but the room, though the shutters were open, and the blind was drawn up, still did not appear above half light. It was, besides, full of mist; and when I sat up, and looked at the window, there was not a vestige of sky, or landscape, or tree, visible from it. I lay quiet a little while longer, and presently heard the clock

in the vestibule strike twelve. It was then mid-day, and yet it was so dark, that I was glad to light the candles on my dressing-table to dress by. When I quitted the room, and went down-stairs, I found the same obscurity reigning everywhere; and in all the apartments and passages the same white mist seemed filling the corners. In the long gallery it was so thick, that, as you stood at the door, the portrait of pale, sad Mistress Eveline, which hung at the opposite end, was entirely blotted out.

The weight of the atmosphere, and the almost supernatural darkness, were most distressing; and it was no wonder that many of those who saw it, declared that it was 'like the darkness which fell upon Egypt, a darkness which might be felt.' I believe the fog was not equally dense in all parts of the kingdom. In London it was, I have heard, most awful, and so continued for nearly, if not quite, a week. I remember hearing that the Prince Regent, having set out to go, I think, to Hatfield, the Marquis of Salisbury's, after wandering about for hours, found he had got no farther on his road than Kentish Town, and was obliged to put back to Carlton House. But I had better not touch on the subject of hear-say accidents and misadventures, which were numerous enough to fill a volume. I will confine my pen to my own recollections.

Mr. Longuet chose to remain at New Court.

I imagine that it had not yet entered into his calculations that it was his duty to do anything that he did not like. Spoilt by the consequential indulgence of his father, and by the idolatry of his mother, their wishes had seldom much weight with him when opposed to his own. I suppose he did take the trouble of letting them know where he was; indeed, he must have sent to Burghurst for a supply of garments.

It was curious how much he and I felt as if we had been long acquainted; our intimacy grew rapidly, and no one thought of checking it. He was a most entertaining and whimsical invalid, and it was impossible, under the circumstances, to contradict him. It was his pleasure to keep me beside him all day, to pretend—and there really was a good deal of pretence in it—that he could do nothing for himself—no, not even turn over the leaves of the book he was affecting to read. I must bring my work and sit near him, and be ready to turn over the page whenever he got to the bottom of it. I remember when we sat down to dinner, and when, as usual, I was taking my place at the bottom of the table, he threw everyone into confusion, and made the General angry by insisting on being next me. He made the most constant demands on my time and attention; I do not mean that I did not find great pleasure in giving up both to him, for I did, but his ingenuity in inventing little services for me to do

was very amusing. He would not let anybody else help him. And I recollect one day coming into the room, and finding him sitting with his poor bandaged hands most ostentatiously displayed, his open book before him, and a most injured expression on his countenance.

He looked at me with eyes full of reproaches, as I came up, and said, in an accent as pathetic as if he had been really hurt, 'Half-an-hour, half-an-hour, Miss Lisle, have I been waiting for your return. You really are too'—and he paused.

'Too what?' I said, smiling at the absurdity of the reproach, when there were plenty of other people in the room to help him, had he chosen.

'Too good,' he answered, smiling also. 'I am tired of reading; let us play at chess.'

I knew nothing of the game, but that did not matter, for he played for both, and my department was moving all the pieces.

And so we amused ourselves like a couple of children, he playing the invalid, and I the careful, attentive little nurse, and were so constantly together, that it was no wonder my uncle spoke of us 'as Lilly and her Robin.' (The 'Robin' having reference to his Christian name of Robert.) The name pleased Mr. Longuet, and whenever he wished to be particularly pathetic, he spoke of himself as 'my poor maimed Robin.'

Days passed, and still we continued wrapt up in the cloud which had covered the earth, as with

a mantle of mist. The morning after the ball at Burghurst Place, I had a letter from my mother, telling me that they intended to set off for Mitchelmore on the second of January, and should hope to see me there at the end of the week. In a postscript, she added, 'The weather-wise people in this part of the world are predicting snow. I hope we may get home in safety before it comes.' And in a second after-thought she said, 'If you should chance to meet Lord Burghurst's son, Mr. Longuet, he is an Oxford friend of Edward's.'

The second of January came, and the fog seemed as thick as ever; but, as I was going up-stairs to my own room at night, I noticed a whistling and a sighing around the corners of the house, which betokened that the wind was on foot again. It was pleasant to hear it, for there was life, and the promise of change in its strange wild notes.

I lay awake listening for some time, pleasing myself with a vision of a clear sky, and unveiled landscape for the morrow. The breeze increased to a furious gale, and truly it was wonderful the variety of noises it made at New Court. Such a rattling of windows and doors, and creaking of boards; such a rumbling up the wide old-fashioned chimneys; such queer shriekings behind the wainscot, and mysterious whisperings through the key-holes, as I think I never heard in any other place. In the morning I sprang up, hoping to see a gleam of winter sunshine, but oh, disappoint-

ment! the window was as impenetrable as ever. I could not, however, believe that the wind had produced no change, and when I was dressed, managed to open the casement, which was so tightly frozen it was no easy matter to force it back. When at last it gave way, I saw that there was indeed a change; snow was on the ground, snow was over head, and snow was falling thick and fast through the atmosphere; a strong wind was driving it along, and piling it up against every obstacle it met with. Already, in places, the drift lay as high as the walls. The branches of the trees bent beneath their burdens, and every now and then let them slip to the ground. The two stone warders no longer bore a human form, and the iron gates were so deeply buried, that to open them was impossible. For eight-and-forty hours it snowed without intermission, and then set in the sharpest frost I have ever known. The whole face of the country was altered, the huge drifts making hills where before all had been level, and filling up hollows and valleys. All fences and hedges had nearly everywhere disappeared, excepting in places swept bare by the wind. And it was really difficult to recognize the most familiar objects. My anxiety about my father, and mother, and Agnes, was great. Day after day passed, and brought me no news. I was sure they must have written, sure that there was a letter for me at Stockford, if I could only get it; and morning



after morning I bewailed its non-appearance, and my own want of tidings. My uncle proved to me how impossible it was that the coaches should run in such weather, and Mr. Longuet was quite sure that Mr. and Mrs. Lisle were safe at Canterbury, but my mother had said they should start on the second, and the snow had not come until night; they probably had, therefore, commenced their journey, and had been stopped mid-way. One morning about twelve o'clock, when, as usual, I had been vainly conjecturing where they could be, Mr. Longuet came into the room with his great coat on, and announced that if any one had any commands for Stockford, they might entrust them to him, as he was that moment going there. Everybody exclaimed, 'He would miss his way, he would be lost in a snow-drift, he would never come back.'

He only smiled and said, 'He hoped to have the pleasure of presenting me my letter on his return, which would be about five o'clock.'

I went into the hall with my uncle to see him off. His hands were almost well, and he had left off the pretence that he could not use them. He took a stout stick to help himself along with. I was stupid, and scarcely understood at the moment, that he was going entirely on my account. I suppose my strong wish to have my letter, prevented me from seeing what everyone else perceived.

‘I do not much like your going, Longuet,’ my uncle said. ‘Three or four miles is a long way in such weather as this.’

‘It is not such bad walking as you think, my dear Sir,’ he answered. ‘I went some way along the lane, and found the snow quite hard; I shall get on famously.’

And he made me a parting bow as he went out.

‘Well, Lilly,’ my uncle said, jestingly, little dreaming how uncomfortable his words were by-and-bye to make me, ‘if I had had a pet Robin, I would not have sent him out in such weather to be frozen to death.’

‘I did not send him out,’ I replied, ‘I never thought of his going.’

And I stood in a disconsolate mood in one of the windows watching Mr. Longuet, the one black spot in all that universe of white. It was only a very little over the three miles to Stockford, and I argued that he would get there in two hours, rest, and return by the time it grew dusk. So I amused myself as well as I could without him, not thinking much of what my uncle had said, and feeling what a relief it would be to have my letter. But the ladies separated to prepare for dinner, and he was not come in; and my aunt said in her quiet way as she gathered her Indian shawl about her, preparatory to leaving the room, ‘I wish, my dear, Mr. Longuet was returned.

It is growing quite dark, he should have started earlier in the day.'

We had to sit down to dinner without him, for the General was so particular, he would not have waited half a minute for anybody; but I could not eat, I was too much occupied in listening for Mr. Longuet, and in reproaching myself for having influenced him to go. I fancied that as the meal went on the General grew uneasy himself, and I could see that my aunt was constantly looking at the door, and heard her more than once ask the servant if he were not come in.

When we quitted the dining-room, however, he was not returned. I am not sure whether there really was much danger, but my uncle's reproach to me of having turned him out to be frozen to death made me wretched. I ran to my own chamber, and threw open the window to see how dark it was. There was a kind of glimmer from the snow and the stars, and it was piercingly cold, although perfectly still, so still that I placed a lighted candle in the open casement, hoping that it might prove a guide to his footsteps.\*

I longed for something to be done, and it was a

\* I do not know whether it may be traced to the anxiety I suffered that night, but I never afterwards saw the country covered with snow, without feeling that its white blank featureless face was the fittest image of despair in creation.

little relief to me to hear that the servants had gone out with lanterns in search of him. How I wished I could have gone too! I could not bear to return to the drawing-room, so I crept softly through the swing-door, taking very good care not to bang it, and sat down on the great staircase to watch for him. Across the hall and through the archway, which bore old Sir Hugh's inscription, the front door was just visible. And there I sat in the cold and the darkness, and thought of him wandering without in the bewildering snow, while the words 'frozen to death,' seemed to be ringing in my ears. More than once some distant sound made my heart thrill with hope. And more than once approaching footsteps made me start up, prepared to fly, lest my uncle, or some of the guests, or servants, should discover me watching, and again, as the sound died away, I settled down on the step, and leant my head against the banisters in a fresh accession of anxiety. Oh! how was it that I had let him depart? Why had I been so hard-hearted and unreasonable? How foolish and childish it was to pine for a letter, which after all, perhaps, did not exist! Yes, but here was a punishment surely greater than the offence, and with the thought came a bright ray of faith in the mercy of God, and I said to myself, 'He will not let him perish, it is not just that he should die because I was silly and selfish.' And I rested in that belief, and kept perpetually saying

to myself, 'God will bring him home, I know He will.'

I must have sat there the best part of an hour, when again I heard a sound. I listened, it could not be Mr. Longuet. No; it was only one of the servants walking along the passage, which led to the offices. But the step came nearer. A side door in the hall opened, and Mr. Longuet entered. I stood half a moment doubtful, until he stepped nearer the lamp, and the light fell on his face. Then I started up and uttered a cry of joy. Had I been a French girl, I suppose I should, as one would say, have 'precipitated myself at his feet;' as it was, my impetuosity carried me, flying down the staircase and across the hall, to within half a yard of him; and there my English nature stopped me, and I only folded my hands upon my own heart, and exclaimed, 'Oh, I am so glad, so thankful that you are come back.'

'So am I,' he said, holding out his hand to me. 'Have you been expecting me long?'

'Yes, so long, I have been watching for you ever since dinner. Why were you so late?'

'I lost my way,' he answered, 'as I was returning, and have been wandering about for hours. But, Miss Lisle, here is your letter. I have not walked into Stockford for nothing.'

'I am so sorry you went,' I said.

'I am not at all,' he replied, 'I would face

twice as much frost and snow, only to be so welcomed, and so watched for.'

And he took my hand again, and we went up the staircase together into the drawing-room.

Everyone felt relieved at his reappearance; but mine was a happiness which brought the tears into my eyes, and made me glad to get into a corner, and sit there, out of sight. I thought he had never looked so handsome. The exercise and the cold had given such a fine manly glow to his cheek, and such animation to his countenance.

'I am glad you are come back, Longuet,' the General said. 'You will not wish to make such an expedition again to-morrow, I dare say.'

'On the contrary,' he replied. 'I assure you the pleasure of the return home is well worth all the fatigue of the journey. Besides, I have had the satisfaction of bringing Miss Lisle her letter. And, you know, I owe her a debt of gratitude for all her care of me when I could not use my own hands.'

It appeared, from his account, that he had got to Stockford without difficulty, or, at least, without more than was to be expected, having walked straight across the country, over hedges and ditches, and only every now and then coming to a troublesome drift. At Stockford he rested, got some luncheon, and started off again about half-past three. But in the gathering twilight he missed the track which his own feet had made,

and had wandered far away before he perceived his mistake. At last he found himself near a farm-house, and went in and asked in what direction New Court lay. Fortunately it was a star-light night, and having learnt to what quarter to direct his steps, he guided himself as well as he could by the stars, and thus reached home in safety a little before eight. The letter, which he had gone through so much to bring me, informed me that my father and mother were still at Canterbury, waiting until the roads were practicable. On the twenty-fifth of January, the soldiers who formed the garrison of that place, were employed to cut through the snow, and clear the road, between that town and London, so that the stage-coaches could run. But the thaw set in on the fifth of February, and made their labour in vain. We all had learnt to walk about in the snow after Mr. Longuet had set the example; and as it became beaten, life went on very much as it would have done had it not existed. But the thaw made us prisoners again. All day long the sound of the dropping and rippling went on. There were floods in many places, which did a good deal of mischief; and the river in the park, which had been frozen over, and a great resource to the gentlemen in skating, burst its ordinary barrier, and, in its swollen and impetuous state, swept away the little bridge which had witnessed the commencement of my acquaintance with Mr.

Longuet. I have said nothing of the fair on the Thames; everyone knows the fact; but I will just add that I have still in my possession a newspaper printed at the press set up on its frozen waters.

It was not until Wednesday, the 16th, that my dear father, and mother, and Agnes, thought the roads practicable, and journeyed homewards; and right glad they were to find themselves at Mitchelmore after their long absence. On the following Monday I travelled thither with my uncle and aunt, who remained a few days with us. They kindly said that they were loth to part with me, and should miss me; and, in spite of being only just returned, when I saw them get into their carriage to go away, I felt that I would gladly have taken my place beside them, and have gone back with them to the spot where I deemed the happiest hours of my happy life had been spent.



## CHAPTER VII.

## MY CONFESSIONS.

'When the thorn is white with blossom,  
And the hawthorn springs again,  
Tell me, Mother, must I shun him  
If I meet him in the lane?'

I WAS about to commence this chapter with the words, 'I must now turn over the darkest page of my life,' but though I long thought it so, I learnt as last to take a juster view, and to acknowledge that there are many sadder things on earth than such a disappointment as mine.

The loss of that which, however much we may have expected, we have never actually possessed, cannot, and ought not to be, so great as the blow which takes from us what has long been absolutely our own. I will not, therefore, now call the passage in my life I am about to relate, albeit embittered by self-reproach, the saddest in the whole chapter, for that it is very far from being, but it was sad enough, not even at this time to be recalled without a pang.

The trial which awaited me was one which, in some shape or other, befalls every, or almost every human being, for it is one of the most

powerful means of discipline and chastisement, and few, indeed, are those who escape, at some period or another of their existence, thinking it also one of the most painful. Those who walk most carefully, who watch most diligently against vanity, against wandering fancies, against a restless desire of change, against all that St. John describes as 'the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life,' are most likely to keep their hearts tranquil and quiet, and to be, by the blessing of God, led to love rightly, and, therefore, happily.

I gave my heart away with the thoughtlessness of a child, without thinking of consequences, satisfied with being for the present exquisitely happy, and in believing that somewhere in that unknown future, which my fancy painted to me as so brilliant, there was yet greater bliss in store. Happy to-day, I was to be happier still to-morrow. I sigh, but who might not do so in comparing life as they dreamt it with life as they have experienced it? There is a sense and there are seasons in which we could all echo the sentiment of Moore's beautiful song, and tenderly complain that

'Each wave that we danced on at morning ebbs from us,  
And leaves us at last on the bleak shore alone,'

only we must ever remember that if we are *alone*, the fault is our own.

I believe during my uncle and aunt's visit to us they spoke to my father and mother of Mr. Longuet, and of my intimacy with him. Indeed, they had no choice about it, for ere we left New Court, Mr. Longuet expressed to them his wish to continue the acquaintance, and begged them to obtain for him Mr. Lisle's consent to his doing so. My uncle told him that he had better speak to Lord Burghurst first, and my father sent him a message to the same effect, telling him that, although he should be very glad to make his acquaintance, he hoped he would not think of coming to Mitchelmore until he had ascertained that his visits there would not be displeasing to his lordship.

I was not told that Mr. Longuet was expected, or that there was anything in agitation. Had I looked pale and anxious, I dare say I should have heard all, but I was not troubled with any doubts, and went dancing and singing about the house from very excess of happiness. I did not need anyone to tell me that Mr. Longuet was coming; I knew it very well, my own heart assured me so, and I had also the better warrant of his own word.

The day before I left New Court, he came to wish me good-bye. He found me alone in the morning-room, feeling very sad at the thought that I should see him no more. Something of the sort I must have said, for I remember his

answering quickly, 'Oh! do not say so, I could not bear the thought. Will you not persuade Mr. Lisle to make me welcome at Mitchelmore?'

My spirits revived instantly, but just at last a strange and sudden sense of distrust came over me, a kind of momentary perception that he might not mean what he said, that it might be out of sight, out of mind with him, and I looked down, and blushed, and added in a hesitating voice, 'Perhaps you will forget all about it when I am gone.'

'Impossible,' he replied, in that sweet, soft accent, which made every word of his so charming. 'Dismiss such a thought from your mind. I can never forget.'

No wonder I went about perpetually singing,

'Dinna forget, laddie, dinna forget,  
Ne'er make me rue that we ever have met,'

until I caught a smile passing between my father and mother, and changed the burden of my song.

One beautiful day, very early in March, I went out to sow flower-seeds in the long border opposite to the front of the house. Agnes and my father and mother had driven in the carriage to call on some neighbours who lived some distance off. I often paused in my work to mark with delight the manifold signs of spring. The birds and the flowers were as happy in the sunshine as I was; the blackbirds were whistling in the gar-

den with all their might, the sparrows were chirping and twittering in the hedges, and in the wood-walk there was quite a concert of small birds, robins and chaffinches, and perchance a linnnet or two, to whose sweet hurried songs the thrush added his own more varied and powerful strain. The golden crocus, the pink-and-blue hepaticas, seemed all trying which could drink in most sunshine, and amongst the long, thin, interlacing shadows of the still bare trees which waved above their heads, the brave little aconites were shining all over the turf. As I sat idly listening to the music around me, I heard the sound of someone riding up the lane. 'It is only Captain Thresher, I thought, fancying I recognized the step of the white pony. The click of the sweep-gate made me look up, and, first, it was not a white pony, but a chestnut horse; and, secondly, it was not Captain Thresher, but Mr. Longuet. I threw my packet of seeds and my gardening gloves into the basket beside me, and sprang up joyfully to meet him.

'Papa and Mamma are out,' I said, after our first greeting, 'but they will be back very soon, and you will stay and see them. You are not going away again directly.'

'I came intending to sleep,' he said, 'if they will ask me;' and I then first noticed the port-manteau strapped on his saddle.

His horse was sent round to the stable-yard,

and I was about to take him into the drawing-room, when he stopped me. 'What were you doing when I rode up?' he asked.

'Sowing flower-seeds. Will you come and help me?'

'Yes, gladly,' he answered, smiling. 'You had better give me something to do; it will help to pass the time until Mr. Lisle returns.'

So we went back to my basket, and he made the little rings in the mould while I dropped in the seeds and covered them up. Presently I looked up, and said, 'But why should you want something to do until Papa comes back?'

'Because,' he replied, 'I do not know what kind of a welcome he will give me, and I feel too anxious about it not to need employment.'

'He will be very glad to see you,' I answered softly, 'I am sure he will.'

But Mr. Longuet only sighed, and said, 'I wish I could feel sure,' and he was so sad and silent, that I grew silent and uncomfortable also. I longed to turn and ask him if anything was the matter, but somehow I did not know how to word the inquiry.

'Papa will be back soon,' I said, to give the only comfort in my power.

'I hope so,' he answered eagerly, 'for I find there is a great difference between making a resolution and keeping it. Mine is giving way rapidly beneath the force of temptation.'

His incomprehensible words and earnest eyes half frightened me, still some vague instinct of woman's nature prevented my asking what he meant, and I only bent my head over my basket, and searched with very trembling fingers, amongst the packets of seeds for, I knew not what.

He remained leaning silently on the rake he held in his hand for a moment or two, then suddenly letting it fall on the ground, he abruptly exclaimed, 'These moments are too precious to be wasted! I cannot bear this suspense! Do leave off making a rout in that basket, and listen to me.'

There was a kind of spoilt-child impatience in his tone, which did not surprise me, because I had often heard it before, but it made me look up with an expression of apprehension on my face, and when I caught his glance, quickly look down again, and mutter something about wanting the sweet-peas.

With an authoritative air he caught up the basket from the ground and hung it on a bough of a laburnum-tree above my reach. The gesture was almost a rude one, and I stretched out my hand, and said, gravely, 'Give it me again—I must have it.'

Instead of complying, however, he put down my uplifted hand. 'I beg your pardon,' he said, in his softest and gentlest tone, 'but I confess myself in such a state of irritation, that I hardly

know what I do. If you only knew what has happened, you would not wonder. I meant to have been patient, and waited until I had seen Mr. Lisle, but I cannot !

‘What has happened?’ I said, really frightened. ‘Is anything the matter at New Court? Is it anything that concerns me?’

‘I—I hope so,’ he replied, in an anxious, yet earnest accent; ‘but how much it does, or will concern you, I cannot yet tell, though I burn to know. Come with me into that shrubbery, and hear what I have to say.’

He pointed to the wood-walk; but I hesitated, and felt loath to go with him.

‘Surely,’ he said, ‘you are not afraid! You will not refuse to hear me! It cannot be the May I knew at New Court turning away from me in that manner!’ For I had begun a retrograde movement towards the front door, actuated by I knew not what impulse. I paused, however, as he spoke, and half turning towards him, said, ‘But why cannot you tell me here? Why must we go into the wood-walk?’

‘I cannot speak with that man within a stone’s throw of us,’ he answered, pointing to the gardener, who was at work in another border at no great distance, and whose presence I had entirely forgotten. ‘I am not anxious that any third person should hear what I have to say, and,’ subduing a smile which seemed on the point of break-



ing out, 'I do not think you would wish it yourself.'

He opened the sweep-gate, and in spite of a secret misgiving of doing wrong, and blushing at my own doubts, I moved slowly towards him, still hesitating whether I had not better go in and leave him alone. But the entreaty in his eyes drew me on, and I passed out into the lane, and in another moment found myself beside him in the wood-walk, my heart beating so fast, in anticipation of what was to come, that I could hardly move. Oh, how many a time, when I trod that path in after years, did that day and hour come back to me! I cannot here set down his words, not that they are forgotten, but that I have no right to repeat them, and no inclination to do so; but could I, or did I, place them before the reader, I could not place the speaking eye, the varied intonation, the force of feeling, which made them at the moment irresistible. The substance, however, I must repeat. My uncle gave my father's message, word for word, on his return, and thereupon Mr. Longuet went to Lord Burghurst, and asked his consent to marry me if he could. He declared that he had no idea that any opposition would be made. But Lord Burghurst would scarcely listen to him with patience. I suppose it was the absence of a title which made him so angry; but he broke into one of his wildest and most ungovernable furies, treated the

whole race of Lisles with the utmost scorn, abused my uncle, and abused me, swore that he would never give his consent, and forbade his son ever to think of me again. In vain poor Lady Burghurst interceded; she only drew on herself a portion of the storm, without in the least mitigating its violence. Mr. Longuet, as soon as he could make himself heard, vowed he would not be contradicted about the matter; that he was more than ever determined to marry me; that Lilly, and nobody but Lilly, should be his wife; that his father might do his worst, since he could neither deprive him of his coronet, or of his broad acres; and, lastly,—oh, how true was the taunt!—‘that it was rather too late in the day to begin controlling him; that they had never forbidden him anything he wished before, and he would not stand it now!’

Reckless and fearless, Lord Burghurst’s utmost fury failed to move him, and it ended in his leaving his weeping mother—banished from his father’s house—and protesting that he would never cross its threshold again until either his father had given way, or he entered it as master. But, thank God, he did not keep that wicked oath.

In vain Lady Burghurst implored him at least to delay his departure. All he would promise was, to remain one day at Stockford, to which place she might send a message in case she could bring his father round to acquiesce in his wishes.

To Stockford, therefore, he went, and remained the stipulated time, but no message came. Lord Burghurst was more likely to have required four-and-twenty months to bring him round than four-and-twenty hours, for his resentments were as tenacious as violent. Very early the following morning, Mr. Longuet mounted his horse, and began his journey to Mitchelmore; no wonder he doubted what kind of reception he should meet with when he got there.

It was only a portion of this sad story that he confided to me as we walked up and down in the wood-walk. For my ear he had another and a softer tale, and the charm of his accents, and tenderness of his manner, blinded me to the true aspect of affairs. I was struck with Lord Burghurst's violence and injustice, but not with Mr. Longuet's undutifulness and rebellion. Was it not for my sake that he was banished from his father's hearth? and what could I do but fondly hope that my father would admit him to ours?

Mr. Longuet took care in his narration to smooth over everything that could wound my pride, and, moved by his passionate protestations and pathetic appeals, I was led, by pity and gratitude and affection, to pledge my faith to him, and to make him all manner of promises with regard to the future, which I had as little right to make then as to keep afterwards.

We remained together in the wood-walk until

we heard the approach of the carriage, then we went back to the house to await my father and mother.

The agitation with which he had spoken, and the tears with which I had listened, had disappeared. I had conceded everything that he could possibly ask, and had bound myself to him for life, as far as my own rash words could do so. So that there was nothing in the faces of either to arouse in my father and mother a suspicion that all was not well. I saw, as they drove up to the door, that they guessed immediately who the handsome stranger was who was standing beside me, and almost as instantly perceived how pleasing an impression his particularly good address, and soft sweet voice, made on both of them.

‘Mr. Longuet is a very captivating person, May,’ my mother said, as we separated to prepare for dinner; and my father called me into his dressing-room, and tenderly embracing me, said, ‘I shall have some talk with Mr. Longuet, I dare say, in the course of the evening; I am not to say him nay, I conclude. If the rest of him corresponds with his looks and manners, I shall think you a very fortunate little woman. But, my darling, I cannot part with you yet; you must be willing to wait two, or, it may be, three years.’

I did not say anything about Lord Burghurst; the calm sweetness of the present hour was too precious to be disturbed. Perhaps Mr. Longuet

felt it so too; at all events, he appeared anxious to postpone his interview with my father, and though he might have spoken to him that night, he made it impossible for any questions to be asked him, by saying, that 'he should hope to have an opportunity of speaking to him the next morning,' and so that evening passed in undisturbed felicity, and we sat together talking, I had almost said playing with each other, much as we had done at New Court. My father and mother sat watching and listening to Mr. Longuet, noting with anxious care every slight indication of character, the little imperious gestures and accents of command, and the low, sweet tones, which seemed to indicate so much amiability and feeling.

Soon after breakfast, the two gentlemen retired to the study, and I waited, in a strangely tranquil state, considering the circumstances, the result of the interview. My summons came in due course of time. Mr. Longuet was leaning against the mantel-piece, with a flushed cheek, and a cloudy, stormy look in his face. My father held out his arm to me as I entered.

'Is this true, May?' he said, in a voice of grave, yet kind rebuke; 'have you been so very foolish as to bind yourself to Mr. Longuet by so solemn a promise? Did you know that Lord Burghurst had absolutely refused his consent?'

I could not but confess that I had, and hung down my head, for the first time conscious of my

error, and ashamed to look up, and my father continued, 'How could you, May, be so thoughtless? What were you thinking about? Could you really imagine that I should suffer you to marry any man, and so young a man too, in opposition to the wishes of his parents? I will never, my May,' and my father pressed me somewhat proudly to his side, 'suffer you to enter a family that deem you not good enough to bear their name, and regard a connexion with the Lisles as beneath them?'

He spoke with warmth. I could not bear standing opposite to Mr. Longuet, and shrinking from his eyes, sank down on a little stool at my father's feet, and laid my head on his knee. Mr. Longuet perhaps misunderstood the action, and fancied I was kneeling in mute entreaty that my father would not part us, for he broke into an impetuous declaration that he would never consent to give up his engagement to me.

'No, Sir,' he indignantly exclaimed, 'I never, never will! My father has no right to destroy my happiness by his absurd pride! I will never submit to such an unreasonable exercise of authority! Do not fancy by refusing your consent you will induce me to return home! Surely you cannot let her kneel in vain? You cannot be so barbarous as to persist?'

My father laid his hand kindly on my head as he answered, 'Mr. Longuet, I grieve for her, and

am sincerely sorry for you. It is a sore trial to you both, but if I were to be so weak as to yield to your wishes, I believe I should be more likely to bring upon you misery than happiness, for if there is one rule of God's providence more certain than another, it is that His blessing never rests upon the disobedient children. It is not, therefore, from pride, though pride would in this case dictate only what is strictly right, it is from principle; my daughter shall not be the snare to lead you into such sin. May, my darling, you would not wish it; you would not wish that he should do evil for your dear sake,' and again his hand rested like a benediction upon my head; then, after a moment's pause, he added more sternly, 'Go home, Sir; go home and make your peace whilst yet you may. You cannot live at peace with God and your own conscience with your father's curse upon you.'

'Dear Mr. Longuet,' my mother said, laying her hand beseechingly on his arm, 'take my husband's advice. Go home at once; think of your poor mother, and go back for her sake. Who knows? perhaps if you have patience you may bring Lord Burghurst to a more reasonable state of mind.'

'You don't know my father, Madam,' he answered bitterly, 'or you would never imagine such a thing possible. I have to thank him for the humiliation and misery of this hour; it is as

much his doing as if he had dictated your answers ; and do you think I shall go back to profess a penitence which I do not feel ? No ! he forbade me ever to enter his presence again, and I never will ; never until he retracts his refusal, and agrees to my marrying whoever I may choose. If you think to drive me home by rejecting me, you are mistaken. Never, as long as I live,' and he clenched his hand, and almost stamped with his foot, 'will I stir a finger to bring to a close a quarrel which, though I am its victim, was no fault of mine. And I tell you again,' turning fiercely to my father, 'that I will not give her up ; I will hold her to her promises.'

But my father interrupted him by sternly saying, 'Whatever promises she made you I utterly annul ; everything is at an end, and I say it with less regret than I should have done an hour ago. A man who is purposely nourishing an implacable resentment against his own father is not one of whose temper and disposition I can think well.'

'Let her speak for herself, Sir, at least,' he said. 'May, May, will you, too, abandon me ? will you give me up because I have loved you better than father or mother, or house or lands ?' and his voice changed from anger to a tone of inexpressible tenderness as he spoke to me.

I do not know what I answered ; I felt I must ; I saw then that there was nothing else for me to do, and I suppose something of the sort passed



my lips, for hardly had I spoken, than he burst out into such bitter and violent reproaches to my father and of his, that, thoroughly frightened and shocked, I sprang up from my lowly position, and taking his hand in mine, exclaimed, 'Oh! don't, pray don't. You must not say such things, indeed you must not,' and feeling that I could no longer check my sobs, I bowed my face upon the hands I held. I endeavoured to make him understand how much I was shocked and pained by his language, how offensive I felt it was in the sight of God. I do not know whether it was my poor feeble words, or the warm tears which trickled over his fingers, which softened him, but he was softened. 'Do not you be hard upon me,' he said; 'I am too wretched to know what I say, and it is difficult to feel charitably towards those who have inflicted such misery on us both. Do not forget me; do not let them teach you to think ill of me. Promise me to remember me ever, as I shall you!'

He drew me gently nearer him, but my father put his arm round me and took me away, and answered for me by saying, 'We shall not teach May to think ill of you unless you give us cause; and as for forgetfulness, I fear it will be long before it comes, but it is what we must wish for both her and you.'

There was a kindness and pity in his accent which made Mr. Longuet fancy there was some

relenting, and he began to urge his claim, hurriedly explaining that his father had no power ultimately to injure him; that every acre was tied up in the strictest entail; that all he could do was to close the doors of Burghurst Place against him during his own life; that he could no more prevent his succeeding to his inheritance, than he could to his title.

But my father would not listen, and again losing his self-command when he found he could not prevail, he vowed he would make Lord Burghurst rue the day that he had so fatally crossed his wishes; and with the parting taunt that he should find other fathers and other daughters less scrupulous, he stalked haughtily out of the room, and quitted the house.

When I looked up, the place where he had stood was vacant, and he was gone, and seemed to have taken my life and strength away with him; for a mist and a darkness came over my eyes, and a cold moisture upon my brow, and my knees gave way under me, and I fainted.

## CHAPTER VIII.

MY CONFESSIONS.—(*Continued.*)

'But unfixed by religion, all love that can't dare  
To challenge God's blessing, must end in despair.'

C. E. L.

It is difficult for any words to do justice to the kindness and tenderness of my father and mother. Agnes, too, had an inexhaustible patience and sympathy, and I often felt so surrounded by love, so wrapt, so steeped in it, that I was ashamed to pine for any other; ashamed to feel that the pure and holy atmosphere of home should ever be deemed insufficient for my happiness. I believe that mine was not a tenacious nature, but rather a spirit given to sudden alternations of grief and joy. I had fits of violent weeping, which often seized me when I had just before seemed most cheerful; but I was not habitually gloomy and depressed. I dare say I said all that is usual on such occasions about broken hearts, but my heart was not broken, though sometimes my tears seemed as if it were. After a very few weeks, I was really, in general, very fairly contented and happy, and able to interest and amuse myself. I

think my capacity of feeling was scarcely yet fully developed. One sad part of the business was, that it occasioned a rupture between Lord Burghurst and the General. The latter was as indignant at the contemptuous manner in which I had been treated, and at the slight that had been offered in my person to the whole house of Lisle, as the former was at Sir William's having encouraged Mr. Longuet to stay at New Court, and promoted his intimacy with me. While both their hearts were hot, and tempers chafed, the two old men met, and so mortally did they affront each other, that they never spoke again in this world, though I think the resentment on my uncle's side died out into an apathetic indifference.

My dear aunt was very much vexed at so unfortunate an ending to my acquaintance with Mr. Longuet. She wrote to me most kindly, blaming herself for not having foreseen it, and taken better care of me, though no one else blamed her, and assuring me that she greatly grieved for my sorrow and trouble, and only wished she could think of anything likely to comfort me. Her concern for me led her to make a sacrifice for my sake which she would hardly have done for anyone else, for one day I received a parcel from her by a private hand, and on opening it, found it contained one of her three highly-prized Indian shawls, with a letter requesting me to accept it, and breathing such love and concern

for me, that the kindness could not fail of doing me good.

I had often thought at New Court that I should like one, and now I had got it; but I could not care about it, and the feeling flashed across me that it was always thus our wishes were granted in this world—their fulfilment coming just too late to give us any pleasure. That sounds equally discontented and ungrateful, let me therefore hasten to rectify the impression. It was only at first I had such thoughts; very soon I began to feel pleasure in my new possession. It was not only my aunt's kindness which consoled me; the beautiful costly shawl did its part. The garment which I hoped to keep and wear all my life, I found had an inexpressible charm from the force of association. It became dear to me as a kind of keepsake, and I loved it and treasured it for the sake of the sunshine and the shadow, the happiness and the sorrow, of which it was the visible memento. Even now I never wrap it round me that I do not feel how full it is of the past. To me there is a beauty and romance in its soft folds which no other eyes can detect, and I love it for the sake of all that is gone as well as for the sake of her who gave it.

Months rolled away, and I heard nothing of Mr. Longuet. My mother hoped that he had taken my father's advice and made his peace with Lord Burghurst, and thought that patience and

constancy on his part might win his lordship to consent. I fed my heart with such hopes sometimes, but as the weeks crept on, they grew, of course, fainter and fainter. Patience was certainly not a word which Mr. Longuet understood, and I question now whether constancy was any better comprehended.

My father's advice made no impression upon him, at least it was not taken. He neither went home nor yet wrote, even his poor mother did not know where he was for some weeks. Some of his uncles exerted themselves to effect a reconciliation, but unsuccessfully, that wretched Longuet temper would suffer neither party to yield an inch, and thus, though the cause of the quarrel was removed, the quarrel still subsisted. Lord Burghurst tried, indeed, to force his son to return by stopping his allowance, and leaving him to live as he could—a most fatal step, for of course Mr. Longuet had no intention of submitting to privation and hardship, and lived at his ease by borrowing money on the estate, which could not fail one day of being his. ‘He who goes a borrowing, lives a sorrowing,’ is a wise old saw almost always found true by those whose misfortune it is to try the experiment. I fear Mr. Longuet's experience was no exception to the general rule.

Three years passed tranquilly away, marked only by the satisfactory close of Edward's career at Oxford, by a visit from Eleanor and her hus-

band, the birth of two more of her children, and the marriage of Agnes. Peace was proclaimed, and William, now Colonel Lisle, arrived at New Court, whereat there were great rejoicings. My life seemed little likely to be ever again disturbed by Mr. Longuet. My intimacy with him had faded away into a dreamy vision, half pleasure, and half pain—a vision which was sometimes, indeed, startled into painful reality by some chance circumstance, but which for the most part lay in a kind of open grave, apparently dead, but not buried, without much disturbing the placidity of my days. I believe I had always a little hope that Lord Burghurst would die, and his son be left free to follow his own devices; and he was so old a man, being past seventy, that he very well might have done so; however he did not.

I sometimes grew tired of the quietude of my life, and felt that an event would be a very welcome excitement, and in the summer of 1816 my wishes were gratified—the even current was for a season interrupted.

Some very old Devonshire friends of my mother's, who were making a kind of home tour, wrote to propose stopping a night or two at Mitchelmore, and my mother, when she answered their letter, begged them to stay at least a fortnight instead of the very short time they had mentioned. To this they agreed, and a very pleasant fortnight we spent together, Mr. and

Mrs. Tremorne being as great an acquisition to my father and mother as their two daughters were to me.

Their visit to us was not, however, the end of the acquaintance. They begged that I might be allowed to return home with them, and after some hesitation, it was settled that I should go. My father and mother wished to pay a visit at New Court to meet Colonel Lisle, and as my uncle wrote us word that there was a large party in the house, I knew that their company would be very valuable there.

My dear mother seemed delighted that I should see her own native hills, and her eyes quite sparkled as she described to me the country I was going to, and begged me to bring her back some sketches of the spots and the places she had so loved in her youth.

I had been with the Tremornes about three weeks, when we were all invited to a ball at the house of one of their neighbours. I remember the weather was very sultry, and we exclaimed at the notion of dancing in such a temperature, and Mr. Tremorne's laughingly telling us, that we were not in the least obliged to go, and might stay at home if we liked it better. Of course no one really thought of doing so. I remember also the Miss Tremornes going into ecstasies about my dress, which was an Indian muslin, worked all over with silver sprays, and a wreath for my hair of silver



leaves and blue corn-flowers. The muslin of the dress was so fine, that I have often drawn it through my mother's wedding-ring, but I had to take off the knots of blue ribbon with which it was trimmed before I could accomplish it. I have it still in my possession, looking with its narrow skirt and wonderfully short waist like a baby's robe; indeed, I question whether now-a-days a baby of any pretensions to fashion would not require the body to be lengthened.

We had a pleasant drive in the cool of the evening to the place of our destination. All the doors and windows of the house were wide open, and the guests kept pouring in and out, so that the room in which we danced was never either crowded or close. In fact it was not so hot as I have felt many a ball-room in winter. Every one was, of course, a stranger to me, and I never thought of seeing a familiar face there; but suddenly an opening in a group of figures gave me a glimpse of a head and shoulders which made me start and colour. The features were turned away, and for a moment I thought I might be mistaken in fancying that I had seen Mr. Longuet, and I endeavoured to persuade myself that my eyes were deceiving me. I knew not whether the sensations which shot through me were pain or pleasure, but the sudden bound which my heart gave, sent such a flush to my cheek, that Mrs. Tremorne, thinking me hot, kindly proposed

my taking a turn with her in the outer air. We got up accordingly, and I had just time to think, with a species of despair, 'We shall not meet, I shall not see him,' when we passed close by the group of which he was one, and Mrs. Tremorne paused to speak and shake hands with some acquaintance of hers. At the sound of her voice Mr. Longuet turned round, and stepping forward, was in the midst of his first compliments to her when his eyes fell on me.

My own were bent studiously down, and yet somehow I could see the instantaneous recognition, and the quick brightening of his face and glance; and it was in a voice of the liveliest pleasure, that he pronounced my name, and claimed my attention.

I shook hands, I could not avoid doing so, Mrs. Tremorne's 'You know Mr. Longuet then, my dear,' making it impossible for me to do otherwise.

It was all confusion for a moment, and when I recovered the power of thought, I found I was walking arm and arm with him towards the dancers. But we did not join them; instead, we passed through the open windows, and sauntered up and down the turf. It was with fear that I perceived how great was my delight in seeing and hearing him again, and in finding that he still remembered me. Yet I had a faint hope that I might walk beside him a few minutes without

touching on dangerous and forbidden subjects; that we might at least for a little while talk as friends. But to talk as friends was not what Mr. Longuet intended. The moment we were in any degree at liberty, he broke away at once from the weak restraint I sought to impose upon him, and began again the story of his wrongs, and his undiminished affection. He *would* speak, and I, touched and gratified by his constancy, and betrayed by my own sympathizing heart, suffered him to do so, with scarcely an effort to check him. He told me that he and his father were upon worse terms than ever, that the only conditions of peace which had been offered him were such that his conscience would not allow him to accept; the principal item being, that he would marry a rich and titled cousin, whom he declared to be his particular aversion. Was he wrong? could I blame him? My wishes would have more weight with him than those of any one else, for I must be changed indeed, and not the 'May' of his imagination, if I could desire him to do such violence to his feelings. Was I changed? But he would accept my silence as a proof that I was not. And as I was silent still, he began most inconsistently to ask indirect questions as to my own feelings. Perhaps I had quite forgotten him. He could not flatter himself that I shared the delight which he felt at this unexpected meeting. I had relinquished him with such

apparent ease, had such perfect empire over my own feelings, was so 'calm, and dispassionate, and reasonable,' (and surely such words were never so misapplied,) that no doubt I had found it a light task to *forget* him, and had not been harassed by the perpetual repining which had made forgetfulness impossible on his side. And I, sensitive to every covert reproach, and melted by the low, soft, beseeching voice, and earnest glance, told him all the truth, as far as I then knew it myself, for it is only by slow degrees that we learn to comprehend even our own hearts, and I do not now think that I quite understood mine then.

I am ashamed to remember how long I remained walking up and down with him, too excited and happy to be prudent, and too timid to assert my own dignity and leave him, although I felt nearly all the time that my father and mother would greatly disapprove of the renewal of our acquaintance.

It was so delightful to find that he loved me still, to be told that the vague hope which I had only feebly entertained had been the prop and stay of his life, and to be cheered by the assurance, that if we were only constant to each other, my father must and would give way.

Mr. Longuet clasped my hesitating hand tightly in his, and said, 'Mr. Lisle could not annul the promises you made me. I was constrained to submit that wretched morning. I had not the

patience to argue. My temper was chafed by all I had undergone, and by finding it all in vain. Do not think of me as I appeared then. I dare say I said all manner of things I had better not, but I only remember bursting from the house in a paroxysm of rage. I was in such a fury, that I could not think even of you with any patience.

The words brought the whole scene back to me, and I sighed as I answered, 'I do not wonder, you must have felt I was behaving very ill to you. But you know that the wrong was in the unconditional promise. I had no right to make it.'

'Do not expect me to agree to that,' he answered with a smile. 'A promise is, in my judgment, sacred to be kept at all hazards, and never to be broken under any pretence.'

His accent was earnest, and blushing at the falseness he seemed to accuse me of, I evaded a direct reply, by saying archly, 'Nay; then you must, to be consistent, think that Lord Burghurst and papa ought to keep their word with us?'

'Not at all, not at all,' he answered eagerly, 'they simply refused a request. There was no promise in the case, and I do not now blame you for your submission. When my anger had cooled, I saw clearly that you had no choice. I was too proud to come back at once and entreat your pardon for my violence, and endeavour to persuade Mr. Lisle to think better of me. I felt sure when I was gone you would forgive me, you would

only remember the happy days we spent together at New Court, and I thought that time should speak for me, that I would not return to Mitchelmore until I could prove to your father that my affection was one of no ordinary tenacity and truth.'

'I should, then,' I said, 'have seen you again, if we had not met this evening.'

'Can you doubt it?' he answered. 'Do you think I could for ever have been satisfied only to hear of you through your aunt? My patience was well nigh exhausted, and I had been speculating for weeks past whether Mr. Lisle would think three years a sufficient trial.' I was growing uneasy at the duration of our interview, and catching sight of one of the Tremornes, proposed joining her.

'Oh!' she exclaimed, as we came up, 'here you are. Mamma has been looking after you everywhere.'

I coloured, and felt very guilty and uncomfortable, but Mr. Longuet said readily, 'I think it is Mrs. Tremorne who has hidden herself, for we have been walking about all over the place, and have seen nothing of her. Can you tell us where she is? Miss Lisle is most anxious to return to her anchorage by her side.'

'You will find her in the card-room,' she answered, but we did not go with her, for she introduced her partner to me at his request, and

Mr. Longuet immediately offered his own arm to her, so we returned together to the ball-room.

My heart was all in a glow the whole of the day after the ball. The indulgence of having seen him once, stirred up the most eager desire to meet him again. Many a time when hungering and thirsting to see him, and to hear his voice, I had said to myself, 'Once would satisfy me; one word, one moment, and my craving would be appeased;' but now I found the happiness had an exactly contrary effect. It was because I had seen him once that I so longed to see him again. I felt almost as if it were a mere cruelty on the part of fortune to have revived all the past by throwing us together, if we were to relapse into our former estrangement. I thought it was impossible, and made sure he would call; but all the next day I expected him in vain, and at last I ventured to ask the Miss Tremornes what they knew of him.

They told me he was a most intimate friend of their brother's, and one of the handsomest and most delightful people in the world; and Augusta added, 'He is on bad terms with his father, I believe, but it is entirely Lord Burghurst's fault. Lady Burghurst's family live in these parts, and they tell queer stories of what she has to endure, poor thing, from his lordship's temper, and quite take Mr. Longuet's part. I dare say he is staying with them now. I wonder if we shall see

anything of him. We should if George were at home, I am sure.'

But on the Monday following the ball, all such doubts were set at rest, for Mrs. Tremorne announced at breakfast that a few lines from her son informed her that he should himself return home that very day, 'and that Longuet proposed accompanying him.' There were great exclamations of delight from those who felt only such pleasure as they might show, but I uttered not a syllable, silently protesting that his coming was no concern of the Miss Tremornes, and with a flutter of heart feeling that the visit was one of his own seeking, as he had evidently proposed it himself. So conscious was I of my own interest in the matter, that I fancied my very silence was suspicious, and longed to be able to say something which should mark my indifference, but I was afraid to trust my voice. My burning cheeks were, I thought, enough to betray the secret I was so anxious to conceal, and, no doubt, if any one had been thinking about me, they would have observed my guilty look. But fortunately no one's attention was directed towards me, though I felt as if they were all watching, and imagined that every eye that was turned my way, was reading all that was passing in my heart. The simplest observation startled me. I fancied they were made to induce me to look up, or to compel me to speak. And so possessed was I with my own fears, that I even



thought there was something significant in the tone in which Mr. Tremorne asked me to have some more butter.

A moment's reflection in my own room made me aware that matters were growing serious. What was I to do? To go at once and tell Mrs. Tremorne the truth? I repulsed the idea with horror. To sit still and indulge freely in his society, and expect that no harm would come of it? No; a vague sense of uneasiness told me that that would be folly, and my conscience whispered, disobedient and undutiful towards my father and mother. I was very unwilling to do anything which was likely to deprive me of the pleasure of being with him. I tried hard, as many a one has tried before, to reconcile my indulgence of self with my duty to God. I endeavoured to hope that He would be satisfied with a half sacrifice made unwillingly. I thought I had found out a way of doing my duty which would not cost me, at least for a good many days, a separation from Mr. Longuet. I sat down and wrote to my mother a letter, which I often thought afterwards was a very artful one, though I was unconscious of art at the time, so prompt is the heart to dictate the words best suited to its own secret wishes. I told her I had met Mr. Longuet at a ball, and that I had just learned that he was coming that very day to stay with the Tremornes; but I wrote so calmly and coolly,

that she could not have guessed the state of my feelings from anything I said; and I ended by quietly begging that she would write immediately, and tell me what she and my father wished me to do. I promised, and it seemed to me that I meant to try and perform the same, that I would endeavour to keep out of his way, and not to be with him more than was absolutely necessary.

But even as I wrote the words, I calculated with a feeling of irrepressible delight that they would not get my letter until Thursday morning, and that I could not possibly receive their answer until Sunday. There was a week, a whole week of happiness before me, and I did not look beyond.

When I went down into the drawing-room, I found Mr. Longuet and Mr. George Tremorne already there. I might after a few minutes have gone away again, but I did not. I contented myself with retiring a little into the back-ground, and watching the others. I had never seen Mr. Longuet before with other young ladies, or at least I had never noticed his manner, but now, as I sat apart, with my head bent over my work, I could not but observe how lightly he amused himself with my two friends, how entirely engrossed he appeared by the desire to please them. A quick momentary glance or two was all the attention which fell to my share. I was vexed and disappointed, and I am afraid looked as grave as I felt. After remaining silent the best part of an

hour, I quitted the room, saying to myself, as I walked sadly away, 'If this is the way he means to behave, I might as well be at Mitchelmore.' He did behave in that manner all the afternoon, but a little while before dinner, just as I was taking a last solitary turn in the pretty wilderness in which the flower-garden ended, I saw him coming towards me. I was angry enough to take another path in order to avoid him, but I suppose he had seen the manœuvre, for he met me in the middle of it. I was turning away, but at his 'One moment, Miss Lisle, I must entreat,' I stood still and listened. 'I know what you are thinking of me,' he continued with animation, 'but what I am doing is all for your sake. We must not let Mr. and Mrs. Tremorne suspect the truth, and I will take all possible care not to go too far. Don't put yourself into the back-ground in that manner, and do not, I beseech you, look so impenetrably grave; it makes me miserable, and it does not suit May to wear anything but smiles on her face.'

He talked until he had done away with my displeasure, but I was very soon obliged to leave him, and I was struck with a painful sensation when I saw him turn away and re-enter the wilderness the moment we came in sight of the house. He said nothing to explain, but I was left burdened with a sense of treachery towards my kind friends, which made me blush again and

again with shame. Yet that evening and several succeeding days were passed in the same manner, excepting that I joined more freely in the general conversation, but they were not days of happiness. Like a troubled dream, I do not love now to recall them, watchful that I was not watched, feverish and excited, jealous in spite of what he had said, always at war with myself, and sometimes angry with him. I purchased daily by such temptations the unwholesome happiness of the many brief tête-à-têtes he contrived. Every night I lay down sorrowful and repentant, promising myself to put an end on the morrow to his professions of attachment and secret attentions, and every day I was weak enough to break my resolution. I passed the nights without sleep, either in bitterly reproaching myself, or in extenuating my conduct by a thousand excuses. I remember that on the Sunday evening, we all went out for a long walk after dinner. Mr. Longuet for some time kept more carefully even than usual away from me, and he made it clear to my comprehension that he was angry with me. And it pained me all the more to perceive it, because I could not think what I had done to displease him. I had expected a letter from home that morning, but none had come, and I was anxious at their silence. On returning home, our road led us through a little coppice, wherein were many paths. I stopped a few minutes behind, determined to

avoid him, and to gather a flower which was new to me, and I was busy looking for a better specimen when Mr. Longuet joined me.

'I am come back to see that you take the right path,' he said. 'What made you stay behind so long? your friends are afraid of losing you.'

Something in his glance and manner made me fancy that he thought I was staying behind for the sake of giving him the opportunity of joining me, which I am sure I was not, so I held up the flower and said, 'I was only looking for another of these; I will rejoin the rest of the party immediately.'

'Will you?' he replied, without moving from the centre of the narrow path which he entirely occupied; 'not until you have told me why you did not meet me in the wilderness this afternoon.'

'Meet you in the wilderness,' I answered, greatly surprised; 'I never thought of such a thing.'

'Yet you did it,' he said, 'for several days. Why was I to be disappointed to-day? I waited about there ever so long in hopes of seeing you.'

'Oh, Mr. Longuet,' I exclaimed, 'indeed it was all accident; at least at first. I did not mean to meet you there every day, indeed I did not.'

'It was a happy accident,' he replied with an incredulous smile, 'why did it not occur again to-day?'

'You do not believe me, I see,' I said, tears of

shame and vexation springing into my eyes, 'but indeed it is the truth. I did not go there at first with the idea of seeing you, indeed I did not, and I stayed away to-day because Augusta and I came in from church too late for me to take my usual ramble.'

'You can scarcely wonder,' he answered in a softer and sweeter voice, 'that I am not very anxious to believe that I am indebted to accident alone, or my own endeavours, for every opportunity of speaking to you unheard by others. This sudden search for a nameless weed for instance, I had hoped—'

'But, indeed,' I replied, 'you should not have thought so ill of me. You cannot wish that I should be so artful. You cannot think it would be right.'

'I see,' he answered with a smile, 'that I must be the artificer of my own fortune. Come, we had better rejoin the others.'

We walked on, therefore, until we came to a spot where two paths crossed each other. I was about to take the one which seemed most like the continuation of that we had been traversing, when he turned off in another direction.

'Are you quite sure this is the right way?' I asked as I turned with him.

'Why, I can hardly be quite sure,' he answered evasively, 'but if we walk fast we shall see in a moment.'

Accordingly we hurried on, Mr. Longuet endeavouring to talk to me, whilst I was straining my eyes in every direction in search of my companions.

He observed my inattention, and said, 'Do not be uneasy; the Miss Tremornes must be some way a-head. I have no doubt we shall see them before long.' And then he began talking of my father and mother, and did I not think it was possible they might be brought to relent ere another year had passed. He succeeded in arresting my attention, although I could not honestly hold out much hope; but I was never weary of hearing him tell the same tale over and over again, from the moment of our first meeting, up to the present hour, and drank in his accents, and trusted in all he said with an intensity of feeling which made me forget at the instant everything but himself. Our pace slackened, and we sauntered slowly on. After a time, however, I again grew uneasy at seeing nothing of the rest of the party, and his evasive answers convincing me that he had intentionally taken the wrong path, I became angry and frightened, and protested I would not go a step farther.

Mr. Longuet tried hard to convince me that there was nothing wrong in what he had done. If I would not help him, he was determined to help himself. Then, as I was still silent, and walked on as quickly as I could that we might

the sooner reach the house, now just visible in the distance, he made me pause by stopping in front of me, and saying, 'Miss Lisle, I want to know what you imagine is to be the end of all this? I know what I mean, but you seem to think that we are just to meet by accident, and nothing more, that nothing is to follow.'

I was still silent, and he continued, 'But surely, dearest May, you cannot be so blind. You must see that I shall not be satisfied to let matters end here. Surely you feel as I do, that we are bound to each other.'

The earnestness of his manner made me feel the equivocal position in which I was placed and the justice of what he urged, we were indeed in a kind of way bound to each other.

Oh, how I regretted that I had not written home in a different style, and had not heard from my mother! It almost seemed as if I were abandoned to my fate. I could not argue with him, and bursting into tears, said, 'That the best end would be that he should go away, and that we should never meet again.'

My distress only moved him to warmer expressions of affection. It might have been my consciousness that I did not deserve any particular deference of manner, but at all events, I fancied that his whole conduct was disrespectful, and rushing away from him, I almost ran the rest of the way home. We found everyone else had long



returned, and Mr. Longuet's careless apology of having lost our road, seemed to satisfy nobody. I was weary, and my shoes were wet through, for the walk had been long, and the evening very dewy, but I heeded neither circumstance. The question he had himself asked, 'What is to be the end of all this?' perpetually recurred to me. His eye and manner, no less than his words, seemed to indicate that he had some scheme widely different from that of waiting with patience for my father's consent. I would not guess what his plan might be, but I felt agitated and alarmed, my heart fled homewards, and I repented me of the evil.

That night I retired to my own room, resolute at last to avoid him. It happened as I passed along the passage, I noticed that the door of his chamber was wide open, and the thought struck me how easy it would be to write a line and to place it on his table, insisting on his no longer seeking me, and looking upon me only as an ordinary acquaintance. My own room was only three or four paces off. The moment I entered it, I drew my desk towards me, and wrote a few earnest words to the above purpose. I did not sign my note, there was no need, but I sealed and directed it; then softly opening my door, crept along the passage, and safely deposited it in a conspicuous position on the stand of the looking-glass. When the deed was done, I rushed back

to my room, my heart beating as if I should be suffocated. I was frightened at my own audacity, and my imagination represented to me every possible mischance which could befall my unhappy letter. I thought some servant might come in, and from curiosity break the seal and read it; then that Mr. Longuet would not find it, and that it would lie about for days, and at last fall into the hands of Mr. and Mrs. Tremorne. More than once I rose up to reclaim it, but the dread of being met stopt me; besides, I found I was shivering so, I could hardly stand. It seemed to me, as I sat and listened to every sound of the retiring household, that the gentlemen would never come up-stairs that night. At last, however, I heard them move, and in another minute could distinguish Mr. Longuet's footsteps along the passage, and heard him shut his door. Now, at least, I could not take the letter back, but a new panic seized me.

What if he should be so furious as to demand an explanation even at that hour? And I sprang up and drew the bolt; but everything remained profoundly still, there was not a sound to betray the passionate misery into which I pictured him to myself as plunged. My own tears flowed abundantly, and I felt thoroughly wretched. In vain I laid my throbbing head on my pillow, but not to sleep; all night I was debating with myself the line of conduct to be pursued on the morrow.

I said that, please God, I would act firmly and rightly for the future, I would resolutely avoid him. That instant how to do it struck me. We were all going the next day to a large cricket-match; I would stay at home, I would have a bad headache, and be unable to go, and I moved my head restlessly about, feeling that it did indeed ache enough to make it no false excuse.

Long after the sun had risen, and I had grown weary of watching his level rays streaming through the shutters, I fell into a feverish sleep, harassed by such uncomfortable dreams, that it scarcely afforded me any rest. I was very unwilling to make a fuss, and call attention to myself by staying up-stairs, but I felt that it was only so I could maintain my resolution, only in my own chamber that I was safe from Mr. Longuet. I told the servant, therefore, who called me, that I was too poorly to get up, and should be glad if I might have a cup of tea in my own room. I asked if there was any letter for me, but there was none. My mother wrote, but, as I learnt afterwards, her letter reached Tor House too late to be of any service. In it she told me that my father intended on Wednesday setting out to fetch me home. A confirmation prevented his starting earlier.

Mrs. Tremorne came to me as soon as she was dressed, full of kindness and remedies, and pronouncing me very feverish, begged I would not

think of rising that day. But I assured her I should be much better after breakfast, should get up and amuse myself quite well with reading and working, and entreated that no one would stay at home on my account. Indeed, I was so earnest on the last point, that I succeeded in driving them all away. I was half dressed when I saw the carriage depart, followed by the gentlemen on horseback, and in less than half-an-hour afterwards, I crawled down-stairs to the drawing-room, and laid myself on the sofa to while away the morning as best I could with a book.

I had at last made the sacrifice demanded of me by my conscience, but no sense of self-approval came to cheer me. I had—I thought I had—done right, but where was the peace of mind which should have been my reward? The past misconduct seemed still to lie too heavily upon my heart to admit of my enjoying any such sensation. I tried to interest myself in my book, but in vain; my eyes and head felt too weary to read, and I sank into a heavy, feverish doze.

I had passed so sleepless and agitating a week, as had already slightly affected my health, and now the chill of the previous evening was rapidly making me ill.

After the interval of some time, I was roused by a slight noise in the room, and looking up, beheld Mr. Longuet standing beside me. He held my note in his hand; he gave me no time to

ask questions, but, with a bitter smile, said, 'I am not so easily dismissed as you imagined,' and he tore the note in half. 'I have returned to tell you, that you shall not treat me in this manner. I pretended business in the village, and rode round that way, promising to rejoin the Tremornes ere they reached the cricket-ground. The moment they were out of sight, I turned back. I was determined, at least, to make an effort to see you, and fortune has befriended me thus far.'

I had risen from the sofa as soon as I perceived him, and sat listening; but feeling so confused and stupid, that I could hardly take in the sense of what he said, and when he paused, I feebly pleaded illness, and begged him to leave me.

'A few minutes,' he said, 'I must allow him to remain. He grieved to see that I was suffering; yet he could not but be gratified at perceiving how much it cost me to give him up. If I would only have a moment's patience, he flattered himself he should be able to prove to me that I was mistaking my duty. If he failed, he would free me from every tacit promise, and tear himself away from me for ever. Could I think it *right* thus to dismiss a man,' he demanded, 'to whom I had bound myself again and again, *honourable* to lead him to believe himself beloved, and then, without a shadow of excuse, to dismiss him at the *last* moment? Could I really think it *right*, just by him and by myself, so lightly to annul

vows so solemn? And what had he done? and again, with greater eloquence and warmth than ever, he went over the history of the past, and all he had given up for 'my dear sake.' Only one thing could ever restore peace between him and Lord Burghurst. If I would marry him, then he should be able to forgive his father; and his father, when the deed was done, and could not be undone, would readily pardon us both. Nothing but this could ever make them friends again. As long as he felt that he had to thank him for all the misery he had endured, and for the loss of that which was dearer to him than his own life, he could not forgive him.

He entreated me to remember that my own father had never had any other objection than the opposition of his. Against him personally, he had never said one word; that he and my mother should not have an hour's uneasiness on my account; that they should know of our conduct, only when all was happily ended, and when he presented me at Mitchelmore as his wife.

Again and again he went over the same ground, calling me by every endearing name, and urging me to comply with a tender vehemence which overpowered my conscience and melted my heart. The alternative seemed set before me of either parting with him then and there for ever, or agreeing to what he proposed. He would listen to nothing else, and I was not yet prepared to bid

him farewell. I fancied that the acute misery I felt arose from the mere idea of such a separation, and that to live without him was no longer possible. As long as he said I was bound, I felt bound, and as if I had no choice but to submit. I offered, therefore, only a feeble and ineffectual resistance. My treacherous heart, divided against itself, could not withstand the singleness of purpose in his. With trembling lips I gave the promise he demanded; then, frightened at the impetuosity of his delight, would have withdrawn it, but he did not seem to hear even what I said. Hastily he detailed a plan, with which he must have come ready prepared, sinking his voice to a whisper, lest anyone should be near. I can still recall every detail, but I will not; enough, that on Tuesday night we were to escape together. He would not return with the Tremornes; he had some preparations to make, which he could do more easily out of the house, but on the evening of that day, he should rejoin the party. He clasped my hands, and made me promise again and again not to fail him, while on his part he uttered a thousand protestations, which, in the confusion and fever of the moment, I little heeded. At last I drove him from me. I can see him now, as he stood for a moment in the open French window, looking so radiant and so handsome, and with his arm held out to me, to bid me, once more, a brief farewell. But I did not move, and

he turned away and hurried to the gate at which he had left his horse.

For a little while I sat with my crimson cheeks resting on my hand, too excited for reflection or self-reproach; but slowly, as the beating of my heart subsided, my conscience began to make itself heard. For a space I resisted its influence; I repeated his arguments to stifle its voice. I was bound, and I could not help it, but in vain. In mercy, I was not suffered to succeed in silencing it. It suggested thoughts to me which made me start in my chair, so sharp was the anguish with which they stung me. It told me that for him there was excuse, for his father was unjust, tyrannical, violent; but for me, for me, with such a father and such a mother as mine, there could be none. The sense of my ingratitude seemed crushing me to the earth; every indulgence and every tenderness I had ever known, especially all their kindness and patience with me in this very matter, passed rapidly before me; my guilt seemed greater than I could face, and I shrank in horror from the contemplation of my own soul. I threw myself on the sofa, and buried my head on the cushion, but I could not shut it out. I longed to run away and hide myself where no one would ever find me; I felt as if I could not wait there, and abide the return of my friends. Then I thought of God's wrath pursuing us all our lives; of His curse following us, go where we would,



and from which we could find no refuge. I thought of the news reaching Mitchelmore, and the unspeakable grief of my father and mother, and Agnes forbidden to write or speak to me, and of being cut off for ever from my own home. My own future life, full to overflowing of sorrows, seemed to pass before me, even that for which I had sinned failing, and Mr. Longuet grown harsh and bitter, and regretting at heart that we had ever met; and overwhelmed by the prospect, I seemed to grow wild and desperate. Suddenly, like a ray of light, came the thought that I had not yet done the deed, and I started up, and clasping my hands together, vowed that, God helping me, I would not do it. I prayed to be saved from myself. I cried out for help, and a burning desire to go home took possession of my soul. It seemed to me that there was no safety for me until I was there. There was my haven if I could but reach it. Oh, for the wings of a dove to fly back to that dear paternal ark! Oh, for the power to kneel at my father's feet, and there pour out all my guilt and contrition! Very soon I began to say to myself that I must go home; I felt if I stayed to meet Mr. Longuet again, that I should be irretrievably lost. I must go home! But how could I travel alone? and my heart sank at the thought of the distance which lay between me and Mitchelmore. Still I kept saying to myself the same words, 'I must go home;' like one

pursued by some terrible fate, I could think of nothing but flying to avoid it. The fever in my blood urged me on, and prevented my reasoning. I looked at the clock, it was scarcely two. The Tremornes would not be at home until nine or ten at night. There was a coach which would serve my purpose that passed the park-gate at three. I hailed the thought as an inspiration from Heaven. I seemed acting from a constraint which scarcely gave my own will leave to stir. I rose, went up-stairs, and laid myself in the bed, and then rang the bell. When the housemaid came, I told her I should like a cup of tea at seven, but felt sleepy, and begged not to be disturbed until then, and requested her to close the shutters. As soon as she was gone, I got up again, examined the state of my purse, and satisfied myself that I had plenty of money to take me home; then, making a small bundle of the things absolutely necessary for the journey, I put on my bonnet and shawl, and taking the parcel in my hand, softly quitted the room. It was very strange, but I was never once struck with the probability of meeting with any of the servants. And by the merest good fortune, I actually met no one as I was leaving the house. I was so impatient to get away, that it was with difficulty I abstained from running, and my sense of pursuit made me repeatedly look behind and start forward at the slightest noise. Still I hurried on, without a

thought of return, the image of home constantly before me, and drawing me onwards, feeling in every step the weight of the burden of sin which was lying on my heart, and beneath which I seemed almost to stagger. But an instinct of self-preservation gave me strength; I reached the park-gate in safety, and walked up the road to meet the coach. I watched it rolling down the opposite hill, and tried to make out whether there was room for me in it. I suppose coachmen in those days knew by intuition when they approached a passenger, for the vehicle as it came up to me, stopt. How I made my wishes understood in the confusion in which my mind was, I cannot imagine. There was a parley with the inside passengers, and one of the gentlemen most kindly relinquished his place to me, and climbed on to the roof himself. In another minute I was seated in my corner, and the horses were again in motion. Then, for an instant, I realized what I was doing, the alarm of the Tremornes, the despair of Mr. Longuet, the censure to which I exposed myself, the eternal separation, the irreparable breach with him, and I felt as if I must have dashed through window and door, and retraced my steps. Yet still something chained me to my seat; it might have been the eyes of my three companions which seemed watching me so suspiciously. Gradually, the old idea took entire possession of my mind, and I felt as if I had

wings, and could have flown faster than the well-trained horses were drawing me. I almost thought they were in a conspiracy against me, and were pacing leisurely along on purpose that I might be overtaken. Through the tramp of their feet, and the creaking of the coach, and the rattling and rolling of the wheels, I thought I could hear, ever gaining upon us, and growing more distinct, the galloping of a horse spurred to its utmost speed, and which was bearing Mr. Longuet towards us. Hour after hour we rolled along, and still the invisible horseman seemed ever coming behind. I knew not whether I wished or dreaded the being overtaken. Once I fancied I caught a glimpse of the horse's head at the window, and my heart seemed to stand still, while my parched lips panted to utter the shriek of recognition which hung suspended on my tongue. The conviction that the vision was a delusion, made me fear that I was losing my senses, and I bent all my remaining energies to the preservation of what remained to me of them. I reasoned and argued, and struggled against my fears, and endeavoured to think calmly what I had better do. Should I travel all night, or should I sleep on the road? It was with the greatest difficulty that I could discover any answer to this question. I kept repeating it over and over again to myself, without being able to suggest any reply. At last I recollected that if I

travelled all night, I should arrive at Mitchelmore at four o'clock in the morning. I resolved, therefore, to sleep on the road, and go on by the first coach the next day. At about eight o'clock, therefore, my only lady companion disembarking at the inn where the coach stopt to change horses, I got out also, and in a few minutes was ushered into a bed-room, and left alone. I drank some tea, and roused myself to inquire how soon I could start the next morning, and learnt it could not be before ten o'clock.

The misery of that long, solitary night, in a strange place, is still fresh in my recollection. One wild fancy after another gained possession of my mind. I remember sitting up in bed, glaring at the door with my feverish eyes, and imagining every sound that broke the stillness to be the herald of Mr. Longuet or Mr. Tremorne. I shivered with apprehension, and my only moments of comfort were those I passed in praying to God to bring me to my home in safety. I thirsted to confess my fault, and lay my aching head upon my mother's breast. I did not dare go to sleep; I was possessed with the idea that if once I relaxed, even in slumber, the effort by which I was retaining my consciousness, I should lose it altogether; that if I slept, I should awake delirious.

I must be brief. Nothing really happened to disturb me, and at ten I started again on my way. A kind Providence watched over me,

and I met with no obstructions or difficulties of any sort. My fellow-travellers seemed inspired with a compassionate regard for me. One benevolent old gentleman, whenever we stopt to change horses, got out to procure me a glass of water, and brought it to me at the coach door; for the dust, and the heat, and the glare, the anguish of mind, and weariness of body, increased my fever to such a degree, that, but for this refreshment, I think I must have become utterly beside myself. It was past five in the afternoon when we entered the precincts of Mitchelmore. I was fearful of passing the lane, but my kind friend kept a look out for me, and called to the coachman to pull up at the right moment. I tried to thank him as I stepped from the vehicle, but I could hardly speak, and ere I had recovered my voice, the Red Rover was rolling away up the next hill, enveloped in its own particular cloud of dust.

In another five minutes I had entered the sweep. How quiet everything seemed! There was not a creature moving. I said to myself, 'they are in the dining-room; they have just done dinner, I cannot go in,' and I hid myself in a thick lauristinus bush to take breath. Now that I was at home, a horrible dread of the anger I had provoked overwhelmed me. I drew a long breath, and clasped my hands together to gather courage, then rushed from my hiding-place through the door and along the lobby and into the dining-

room without a pause. For a moment I stood irresolute on the threshold. My father and mother started up and looked at me for one single second without recognizing me; then, as my identity flashed upon them, I sprang forward, and threw myself at my father's feet. He tried to raise me, but I would not be raised. With incoherent vehemence I poured out my sad history. I endeavoured to make them understand the whole truth, but it seemed to me that they could not take it in. At last I brought it home to my father, for he caught me suddenly to his heart, exclaiming, 'Thank God, thank God, that I have you safe, my child!' They *would* be so kind to me! In vain I sought to draw down the anger I knew I so richly deserved. 'Yes, darling,' my mother said, 'you shall tell it us all again to-morrow; but now you are so tired, you must come up-stairs to bed;' and she wiped the tears from my face, and dipping her hand in the water on the table, laid her dripping fingers upon my burning head. But I was not to be stopped, and I believe soon became altogether delirious. Of what followed I have no recollection; life was blotted out to me for several days.

But an hour or two after I had been carried up-stairs, Mr. Tremorne arrived in a state of the greatest anxiety, to break my flight to my father. Fortunately, he found that the missing bird had already flown home.

When I came to my senses, I was aware that I was lying in my own bed at home, and that my mother was sitting beside me. I was conscious of being too weak to speak, or even think, but I lay lazily watching a ray of sunlight which came in through the side of the blind, and resting upon a small round table which stood near the window, seemed playing with something upon it, which looked like a heap of golden gossamer. I watched it for a long time, and at last it struck me that it was tresses of long curly hair that were shining so brightly in the sunlight, and then that it was my own hair that I was lying there and admiring. In fact I had had a narrow escape of a brain fever, and my head had been shaved.

I thought I should never get well again, but I did, and long before I had fully recovered my strength, I had renewed my confessions to my father and mother, and had received every assurance of pardon that even I could desire. Indeed the contrast between their kindness and my own conduct often made me weep between gratitude and shame. It hardly seemed as if I could ever forgive myself, or ever in future do enough to reward them for their goodness to me, and I did with my whole heart thank God that I had left my sin unfinished, and so had in some measure atoned to them for the guilt of the design.

I do not profess in these chapters to do more than narrate the outward course of my life. I



cannot bring myself to speak much of the life within me, of the spiritual progress which the cares and troubles which were sent me were designed to foster.

Whilst I was still too ill to send a message, and my recovery even was doubtful, my father wrote to Mr. Longuet. Of course I saw neither his letter nor the answer; but when I grew well enough to be once more able to think and feel, I could not but remember how much I must have pained him. I felt I had sinned against him, with a burning shame, which recalled to my pale cheeks the hue of health. I recollected the solemn promises I had made him in our last interview, and as I lay, weak and suffering, on the sofa, the bitter tears of contrition often fell too fast for concealment. Do not misunderstand me; it was not that I repented that I was safe in the sanctuary of home. That I never grieved for, but I wept for the weakness of purpose and principle I had shown which had led me on until there was nothing left to me but either to betray my duty to my parents, or to break deeds and words which, under all ordinary circumstances, cannot be broken without dishonour. The conviction that I had used him ill worked in me an ardent desire to say so. I felt unworthy to ask to be allowed to write, yet the knowledge that there was no pardon to be obtained from him, that to him I might never confess 'I was wrong, forgive

me,' lay so heavy in my heart, that its weight retarded my recovery.

My indulgent, tender mother, noticing my depression, set herself to discover its cause. With fear and shame I confessed the truth, trembling lest they should think that I repented that I had returned home, and was pining for him. But no such suspicion occurred to them. My father, when he understood my wish, talked to me, and gave me leave to write, and with a delicate consideration for me, of which I was entirely undeserving, but for which I thanked him with my whole heart, he bent down and gave me one of his rare caresses, and said, 'Write what you please. I will inclose your letter, but we will not read it; we know that the spirit of it will be all that we could wish.'

He placed the writing things on the table beside the sofa, and left me, but it was long before my tears would let me use them.

I felt very humble, and all I wished to say was, 'I have used you ill, but it has been from weakness, and not from wilfulness; my feelings led me wrong, and I grieve for the pain I have given you. Think of me without anger, and judge me mercifully.' I do not mean that I wrote these very words, or that that was all that I said, but it was the substance of my letter. I gave it to my mother unsealed, and asked her to read it. I felt I should be better pleased that it should have

the sanction of her approval. She did approve, and carried it to my father, and in due course of time Mr. Longuet's answer arrived. But it was not such a reply as I had hoped for. My father called it 'ungenerous,' and said he was sorry he had allowed me to write, that Mr. Longuet had shown himself unworthy of any such condescension.

But perhaps the injury was one which no man could forgive. Mr. Longuet seemed to misunderstand my conduct. His words were bitterly cold and angry, and he never appeared to remember that, however fickle and inconstant *I* had been, he had not been blameless.

The spirit of his letter was one of contemptuous indifference. It cut me to the quick, and it was long before I could bring myself again to acknowledge that I had ill-used him, and could not expect justice at his hands, and did not deserve it. Oh! if anyone could but have set before me, when with the Tremornes, all the suffering I was heaping on my own head by my conduct, I surely should have turned back before things came to such extremities! But the price of sin is rarely calculated beforehand. Let me recount the cost of mine. I lost Mr. Longuet, I lost my health for weeks, I lost my own self-respect, I lost the respect of my friends and acquaintance, I laid up a store of bitter recollections, of memories which have yet the

power to sting, and which I cannot yet recall without shame.

When it was all fresh, I shrank from the notice of the world, and when forced into society, fancied a coldness even where it did not exist. I needed all the love and tenderness of home to save me from becoming morose and discontented. If my father and mother had been less judiciously opposed to it, I should have hid myself for ever out of sight. But they would not allow me to give way to the feeling, and in time I out-lived it, though I had long the pain of seeing myself lightly esteemed, and of perceiving on various occasions that my conduct was remembered against me. What may be called the natural consequences of sin, God seldom, if ever, remits even on repentance; and the knowledge that what we sow we must reap, should teach us not only to take heed to the sowing, but to endure the result with fortitude, not to murmur at the pain for which we have no one to thank but ourselves. I know my punishment did not exceed my offence, and in the end I almost think it wrought for my happiness.

I was very thankful that Mr. Longuet and I were little likely to meet; his eyes I could never encounter without shame, and the entire separation doubtless aided me to forget him. I thought we never should have looked on each another again on this side the grave; but once, years

afterwards, I saw him. We met by accident, and it was but for an instant, and then he passed on, and I saw his face no more. It was a warm bright spring day, and I was walking in the turnpike road with one of Agnes's children, a little girl of about four years old. We were both busy gathering violets, which grew along the southern bank in profusion, when I heard the approach of some one on horseback. I did not look round, and satisfied that little Mary was beside me, continued my search for the sweet white blossoms; but a cry and an exclamation made me start up. I turned, saw her in the act of falling at the feet of a horse, whose rider threw him back almost on his haunches to avoid treading upon her. I sprang to the child, and raised her. She was frightened and crying, and I was busy wiping the tears and the dust from her face, when the stranger courteously expressed a hope that she was not hurt. It was Mr. Longuet. The soft voice made the blood rush to my face, but I could not believe my ears, and lifted up my head. Our eyes met, and as he recognized me, the smile died away from his lip, his cheek flushed with anger, he drew himself proudly upright, whilst a look of scorn, and almost hatred, darkened his face. It was but the glance of a moment, for shame made me quickly bow my head again over my little niece, and I saw by his shadow that he barely deigned to touch his hat as he passed on. I watched him mounting the hill,

with his servant behind him, until he faded in the distance.

How he came there, or where he was going to, I never knew. His life was as much hidden from my scrutiny as mine was from his. Somehow or another, a reconciliation had been brought about between him and his father, but before Mr. Longuet succeeded to the title he had so mortgaged the estate not yet his, that he found it necessary to seek in a rich wife the means of redeeming his paternal acres. He married a city lady, with a large fortune, but I knew nothing of their domestic life. Since the death of my uncle and aunt every trace of him has been lost to me.

With him ended the romance of my life. I say the romance. I am very far from meaning the happiness, for I think I did not settle down into the serene, tranquil happiness of womanhood until I had recovered from the effects of my attachment to him.

And now what remains to be said? A brief chronicle of the succeeding years may bring this narrative to a conclusion. Agnes had before married, as the reader already knows, to the entire satisfaction of my father and mother; Edward took holy orders, was presented by my uncle to a small living, and in due course of time followed her example. Thus I remained the last at home, and thought myself happy in being permitted, as some atonement for the past, to be all

the world to my father and mother in their declining years. I had not vowed that it should be so, but I had hoped that, please God, this might be suffered, and that I might thus prove my gratitude for their exceeding mercy and tenderness to me.

Amongst the many gentlemen who visited at Mitchelmore, Mr. Wootton was still the most constant; a grave, kind man, who had never been anything but elderly in the recollections of his oldest friends. Even my father called him 'old Wootton,' and yet he was in fact only some fifteen years my senior. I think his premature appearance of age was owing to his having had, even in youth, a bald head. We had known him all our life, and though I could never see that he liked one better than another, he was supposed to have a preference for me, and Edward used often to try and teaze me by predicting that I should marry 'old Wootton' at last.

As years went on, he came more and more often to the Rectory; his own home was solitary, and he was a sociable man, and was glad of the change. When I was about seven-and-twenty, a change occurred in his circumstances which put it within his power to marry. I believe he had never before been able to do so, and then I became aware that Edward's joke was true enough, as far as his feelings were concerned. But my father and mother were breaking fast, and I made him

understand that he must not ask me to leave them. It was no sacrifice on my part; he was too unlike my youthful dream for me to wish to marry him, and I was too happy and too useful at home, too much wrapt up in my dear parents, and too much worshipped by them, to have any restless desire for change. So Mr. Wootton seemed to lay aside the thought, and we went on being just as good friends as ever. He came to Mitchelmore quite as often, and I, from my increased knowledge of his character, grew to have a warmer regard for him, and greater pleasure in his society.

In the winter of 1834, my dear father departed this life, and Edward' succeeded him in the living of Mitchelmore. My mother and I removed to a small house in Mr. Wootton's parish, for the sake of being within reach of our old haunts, and that she might be near her children. I thought when my father died I had never tasted sorrow before, so far deeper was that affliction than any I had hitherto experienced, and my poor dear mother really bore the shock of our bereavement better than I did. Many a time during the last years of my father's life, had some symptom of decay, the labour and sorrow of our latter days, warned me that his decease was at hand. But nothing could soften the blow to me when it came. It seemed to shatter the whole fabric of my happiness. My mother, however, was left, and with her example



before me, I dared not sit down and repine. Mr. Wootton was indefatigable in his kindness, and at last it was forced upon me that I should best consult her happiness and my own by accepting the home he offered to us both. My mother's wishes would alone have decided me. I remember one day, when I was sitting on a low stool by the fire, her laying her white, but withered hand upon my head, and pleading with me not to refuse him, she prayed that she might have the consolation of leaving me in the hands of so kind a protector. And I yielded; I thought that I was following the will of Providence, and had no right to cast away from me for the sake of any dead and gone love, the very means which He had provided for the comfort of my future life. I knew also that Mr. Wootton was acquainted with my past history. I had felt his knowledge of it when first I recovered from my illness in many and many a kindness, which had been gratefully appreciated. I had, therefore, no confession to make him; he knew all, and yet he chose me.

And so I fulfilled Edward's prophecy, and married 'old Wootton' at last. I had married from duty, but I found a happiness greater, far greater, than I had anticipated. I found a love on his part which had grown in silence through many years of discouragement; and in my own heart I perceived an affection arising which soon made me doubt whether I had ever loved any-

body as well, and which, long ago, has convinced me in all seriousness that I never did.

To my own surprise, and that of every one else, I thus late in life entered on new duties, and another long period of serene and tranquil weather was mercifully granted. There seemed a spell against my growing old, for my husband I believe always forgot to think of me as otherwise than eighteen, and I had, to the last, the charm of youth in the eyes of those with whom I lived.

Father and mother and husband are all alike gone now, and that loneliness has come which my tender mother so dreaded for me. But I do but stand and wait my summons, with the conviction that it must come ere long. I have brothers and sisters, and nephews and nieces, to supply me with external interests, and I am not even now uncheerful. Mine has been a happy life, with as few cares and sorrows as could fall to the lot of any one, and I thank God for it.

Like my grandmother of old, I thank Him for the manifold blessings of this life, and I look forward with a hope which seems to grow stronger as it grows nearer its fulfilment, to that eternal reunion, and those greater blessings that He has prepared for His servants.

